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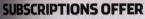


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Closing date: 26 May, 2010. Full offer details on page 60.

Meet The Tear

The shocking bunch responsible for this mess



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Freelance

Now a part-time full-timer, Jon 'Log' Blyth now phases in and

out of existence in the PC ZONE office like the following pop culture references: Captain Janeway in the Voyager episode

where the transporter is on the blink. Jacob in the second

series of Lost. Marty McFly in Back to the Future when his

his own arrival in our dimension. God bless you, Log.

parents almost weren't going to do it. He's like our very own ginger TARDIS, making satisfying whooshing noises to herald

ALEC MEER

A recent game of rock, paper,

falling limply to the floor and gurgling as if we'd made a crude,

scissors with Alec ended with him

veiled reference to his other job.

NOW PLAYING: Chaos Rising

Freelancer

Freelancer

Creed II

AGE Young at heart LIKES Being liked **DISLIKES** Being disliked **FANCIES** Wine **FAVOURITE GAME** PacMan NOW PLAYING Assassin's Creed II



STEVE HOGARTY

Boss hog

Unable to go home for St Patrick's day. Steve dressed in green, and downed huge amounts of Guinness, potatoes and soda bread, while reciting Father Ted scenes instead. NOW PLAYING: Just Cause 2



DAVID BROWN

Staff Writer

As a major league metalhead David asked Sports Interactive to add a Soilent Green soundtrack to Football Manager Live. Their response: "Er... who?"

NOW PLAYING: Mass Effect 2



NICK BRAKESPEAR

Freelancer

This month, Nick made his own hat-based expansion for Dragon Age: Origins. What are the chances? A milliner-to-one. **NOW PLAYING: Dragon Age:**

Origins





This man can't go into an MMO without being mobbed by fans. And by 'mobbed' we mean 'lynched' and by 'fans' we mean devs he's insulted.

NOW PLAYING: PKR



WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... an extra hour of daylight brings us one step closer to cider in the park. WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... a string of Burger King meals brings us one step closer to a coronary.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

ALAN TITCHMARSH 13min The rumple-faced ex-gardener takes daytime telly to new lows

VIDEOGAME BAFTAS 1min No Kanye-style interruptions, shamefully.

TAX BREAK 1min We await the unveiling of Ubisoft Basildon with bated breath...

GDC 4min Living vicariously through Will Porter is a dangerous occupation

BAD EXCUSES 2min "My bus driver got lost." "There were horses on the track." "I couldn't find any of my clothes."

WORSE EXCUSES 3min "I was trapped in the past." "I was, briefly, the president of a small island nation."

FOR SALE: SYRINGE 1min Syringe that allegedly killed Michael Jackson is for sale. Only £3.3million

IN THE HEAD 3min Chinese gamer accused of cheating is knifed in the head. A fair punishment?

ALIEN VS POOH 2min Yes. That Alien and that bear: godxiliary.com/alienvspooh

TALKING SHIT 2,000min We've been bored.





'In this issue of the UK's best PC mag...

F-THREE-AY-AR

ABIES. TERRIFYING LITTLE factories of stink. Small girls. Hauntingly ever-present, and clearly plotting our demise from behind all that lank, greasy hair. Old hags. Flailing and angry after so many years of rejection and loneliness. F.3.A.R. is constructing a cast of the most heinous horror villains imaginable.

But what's truly terrifying (not really, but let me punch you with the melodrama all the same) is the flippancy with which publishers are naming their seguels. This'll be the first of about five mentions of F.3.A.R.'s nonsense name you'll read - unless you're reading back to front like some sort of psychopath - but it's really worth stressing the point. It looks awful, jarring and stupid.

Preferable, though still rubbish, would be the more classic Game Name: The Subtitle construction. Or the unoriginal but, more importantly, not ridiculous method of putting the number after the game's name. We know, having whispered it down the phone to our mums (who we tell about all the secret new games), that it's pronounced F.E.A.R. 3, so that's how you'll see it displayed everywhere in the mag from now on. Except in headlines, because, as I've come to learn in my tenure as Zone's editor, that's a special and wonderful place with its own special rules. 3njoy th3 m4g.

Steve Hogarty Acting Editor steve.hogarty@futurenet.com



Alma's back, and this time she's got a bun in the over. A bun that heralds the death of humanity, but you can't hate a baby. Right?



The Old Republic now has a rival for the Most Wanted MMO crown.

Save 25% and get a Mionix gaming headset! See page 60









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THE INTERACTIVE BIT OF PC ZONE – BLOGS TWITTERS, AND OUR FAMOUS FIGHT CLUB!





FREEWARE

This month: love over a modem, trim hedges, spell with physics letters, fly planes, and play with sheep.

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



Too busy? PC ZONE in 73 words...

This month we heading to the land of Vertigo, Tales of the City, Bullitt and Nash Bridges to take a look at what the year holds for we gamers. We also got royally drunk and hung out with strippers, but that's not unusual. Apart from our massive preview section, we have Kane's death blow, Moscovian nightmares, big metal tubes, more dragons, naughty marines, and a pile of stuff that isn't so exciting. Sorry.

COMMAND & CONQUER 4:

Letters

Steve Hogarty braves a deluge of digital correspondance, and for what? This?







KING OF LETTERS

AMPUTEE-TIME

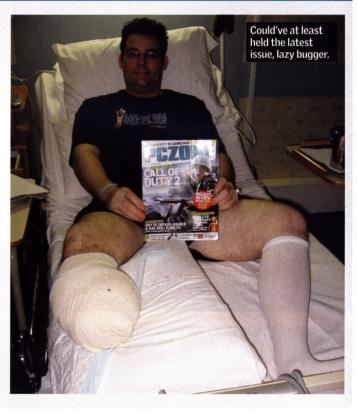
For as long as I can remember, your PC ZONE Around the World feature has been just that. You ask for inappropriate, and all you get is "I knew my holiday would be shit, so took my PC ZONE to keep me occupied".

So with this in mind I thought: if you want inappropriate, then that's what you shall have, so I got the wife to take this pic of me the day I had my leg amputated. Hope this does qualify me to appear.

Jason Hudson

We've been holding off printing this letter for so long that your leg's probably grown back by now, with extra strength, a cocky attitude and +1 resistance to further amputations - such is our understanding of the human body.

Readers, Jason's raised the bar for inappropriate PC ZONE Around the World photos, so much so that we've had to make him King of Letters. Time to up your game!



BEAT THE DRM

So, when I read about the outrageous DRM in Assassin's Creed II I thought you guys would be all over it, that you'd support the legitimate customer and tell

Ubisoft of the error of their silly ways. Sadly, my naive optimism was dashed. "'To admonish a publisher for including inconvenient DRM would be irresponsible and misrepresentative," thundered the editor, "it's our job to inform and warn," he raged.

So I turn to Log's review, thinking he'll stand up and tell it like it is. But no.

"Cloud save games," he writes, "no disc play and no install limits, see? It's not all kicks in the dick, Ubisoft loves you really."

So far, so patronised. But I suppose it's more diplomatic than telling a major games company (who may or may not invite certain games journos overseas to show off new games) that their DRM is the most appalling draconian rubbish which will inconvenience no one except legitimate paying customers

effectively excludes anyone with a poor internet connection, and that far from preventing piracy, it will serve only to dramatically increase it.

However, as PC ZONE policy seems to be leave intestinal fortitude at the front door we should not be entirely surprised. I've no doubt the game is brilliant, but the DRM is a massive part of that game. And for you brave journalists to obfuscate and pussyfoot around it as you have does you no credit. Poor show gentlemen.

Lee Curran

The Ubisoft DRM controversy came

to light as we finished issue 219, and in the interim some of our grievances have been mitigated. It's still too soon to do anything more than be explicit in our







"I played Bad Company 2 and all was where it was supposed to be"

description of how the DRM affects you, and we certainly can't allow it to impact on the game's score, if only because I predict that this DRM will have changed entirely in about six month's time.

Rest assured though, that the sum total of our resistance to Ubisoft's masterplan is not a childish snipe in an editorial and a tongue-in-cheek back page. We've a full investigation into DRMgate coming up in issue 221, in which Will Porter discovers that Ubisoft are, as we all predicted, in league with Beelzebub himself.

EVERYTHING'S GOOD

So there I was, beginning to lose faith in the development of PC games, beginning to think that some of the big games designers were missing opportunities for epic PC titles.

Why no multiplayer in Mirror's Edge? Rooftop chases, slow-motion gunplay and melee combat. Why wasn't Operation Flashpoint 2 as good as it should have been? Why no dedicated servers for Modern Warfare 2? But then some things happened: Mass Effect 2 wasn't dumbed down for the consoles; BioShock 2 was actually better than the first game; Heroes of

Newerth is mind-bendingly awesome; multiplayer has been announced for Assassin's Creed III; and then I played Battlefield: Bad Company 2, and everything was where it was supposed to be.

Jack Mason

Now there's the sort of optimism we just don't get in our letters pages any more. And you're right too, a boatload of PC-considerate titles have arrived lately, but we're all too busy shitting in envelopes and posting them off to French publishers to notice. Let's see how long we can maintain this glorious wave of positivity.

MOAN ON SUNDAY

Despite the years of spot on reviews, laughs and off the wall (but not selfindulgent) articles, I can safely say the single most uplifting moment that PC ZONE has





ASSASSIN'S CREED II

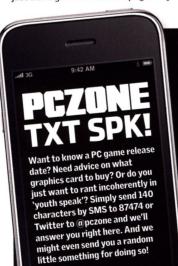
Vauxhall Whitcut PC ZONE SCORE 90%

The muscles in my legs tense in the final half-second before I leave the ledge, launching myself in a graceful arc through the warm summer air. My cape flutters in the breeze as I reach the zenith of my leap, the ledge now deliriously distant, the ground an abstract patchwork of tiles. I sail through an open window, and into a waiting office chair. In front of me, Assassin's Creed II is loading.

Oh wait, hold on The Ubisoft servers are down. So I can't play the singleplayer game I paid for, and it really is rather frustrating. I defenestrate once more. this time with less grace, and no intention of a neat landing.

YOUR SHOUT 0%

Send your reviews with a maximum of 120 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game



Any idea if there is going to be a new Far Cry? Hayden Morris

We'd guess: yes. But as for where it'd be set? We've no idea. Where would you like to see the series go?

What comes after Napoleon: Total War?

Louis XVIII: Total War, presumably.

Flotilla, why have you not reviewed it?

We bloody have. Go look.

Just Cause 2 is very good. More more! Henry W.

We're not sure that's how sequels work...



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delivered was provided by Log's infiltration of the Mail on Sunday and the revelation that those that write it know it's all a load of pony droppings. Thank God – my faith in humanity immediately rose 50%.

So there's a bit of soul-selling going on but that's human nature, like swearing for emphasis or never making it farther than a pub within spitting distance for work drinks.

How about an inside scoop on politicians next, though perhaps there's a limit to how much soul selling is acceptable? At least your mum would be impressed though.

TheWatcher1001

So it's settled, Log's next mission is to infiltrate the British National Party and reveal that, despite all of the evidence and video footage and interviews and reports and facts, they're not actually a pile of racist xenophobes and are, in fact, just being really ironic.

Women in games, eh? How about those women. In games. I don't understand the sartorially distorted world they're living in. Why, for example, do all their tops stop a few inches above their bellybuttons? And start a few inches above their nips? I can think of only two

exceptions: Alma and Alyx. Otherwise it's off on the flesh boat for the rest of them, calling at Tittytown and Tummyville. I won't be happy until Max Payne's balls are hanging out.

Cecilia Woman

Very true.

OFF THE FLESH BOAT

In response to Cecilia Woman's letter (above), it's not just women being ogled in virtual worlds. If you'd turn your attention away from the PC for and towards the children's console the Nintendo Wii, you'll find a wealth of steroid abusing men parading around in thongs in Muscle March. I've attached a picture so that PC ZONE will print it. They have to, as it forms part of my legally binding 'right to reply'.

Johnny Bloke

level the playing field.

EA's rash decision to change the in-game pricing system in Battlefield Heroes is a bad one for many of us players. It means we non-paying players have to play five hours a day to get enough Valor Points (the free-to-play alternative to real money) to rent

a single weapon for one day. Meanwhile, buyers who spend at least double that of a normal game in the shops run around with their fancy clothes and bigass weapons.

I bring your attention to the

penultimate lexical quadrology,

Ibex of the Capra genus: a sure-

IBX4, which could only refer to an

footed mountain goat. As foretold

by the serial key: four of them will

visit to teach you a life affirming

Have you got a mystic serial key you'd

like Mystic Will to divine? Then send it

into letters@pczone.co.uk, Readings

are guaranteed 100% accurate.

lesson. WLTG, then, can only

mean "Will listen to goats".

apczone **t**

How can EA expect non-paying players to be happy? The game's still buggy and forums are crowded with issues that never seemed to get fixed. So much for free-to-play, now it's more like free-to-die-by-a-buyer-who-spends.

Sam Clusker

You're absolutely right, EA got greedy with Battlefield Heroes. But can't you just be happy about the bit where the soldiers sit on the wings of planes?

THE FLESH BOAT

He's right, you know. Pictures like this **PAY-TO-WIN**

We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

PCZONE 🐼 AROUND THE WORLD





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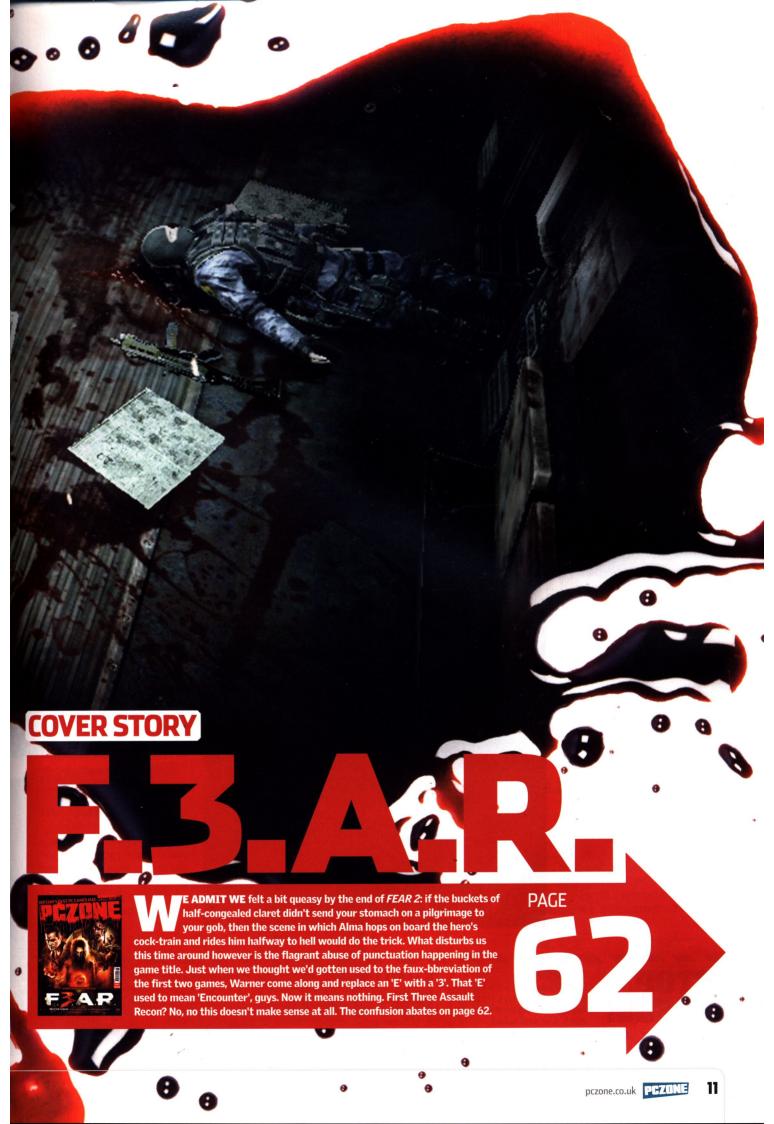
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Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming



SECRET

O GDC HAS been and gone, and we're left mopping the floors as the last game announcements stumble out the front door, drunk on publicity and falling into unlicensed minicabs, which is something you should never ever do.

I operated Will Porter from afar, like the bad guy in Mass Effect 2, metaphorically assuming control of his body as he went "behind closed doors" to see F.3.A.R., before relinguishing control as he was made to stare at German turn-based strategy games.

My game of the show (the show I was 5.370 miles away from) is The Secret World, Funcom's MMO set in the real world and beset by zombies and other conspiracy-bound ghouls. Age of Conan did the studio few favours - though it's relatively successful, and expecting an expansion in Rise of the Godslayer and had them retreating slightly from their lofty ambitions after a drop-off in users. But The Secret World makes use of Funcom's greatest asset - the one evident in their pre-AoC catalogue - writing.

Now unshackled from a licence, they can do whatever they like with their MMO's world, hopefully introducing a new standard of storytelling to the genre. Is that too optimistic? Probably, but between The Secret World and The Old Republic, change is definitely on the horizon for the defiantly stagnant, money-churning genre. The further we can get from fantasy the better. All that MMO rumination starts over on page 50.

GOD COMPLEX

Elves, dwarves and plenty of turns to be taken in Disciples III: Renaissance

DEVELOPER. dat **PUBLISHER** Strategy First **WEBSITE** disciples3.ru **ETA** Summer 2010

IRST THING YOU want to know about a fantasy game is whether the Elves get their assets out for the lads. Well, it seems that in Disciples III: Renaissance, there is more than enough flesh to suit even the most skin-obsessed player.

There's also a unicorn in it, so the developers are also concerned with other niche pornographic markets as well. However, they're mainly concerned with one more subsection of society, one that's even more depraved and isolated than unicorn fanciers: turn-based strategy gamers.

Perhaps more people will join their hunched, shadowed ranks when

Disciples III comes out, for it might just be that game to make turn-based strategy funky again. The game will be the latest in a venerated series, giving players the chance to control three different playable races. First off there's the Empire (humans), then come the Legions of the Damned (evil humans), finally the Elven Alliance (elves and maybe some walking trees and forest animals or something). Also, in a bid to win over new players, the battle system will be completely revamped from what we've seen before

In these skirmishes, every army needs a hero or leader, so that's exactly what you'll get. These bastions of good/

Hopefully, he's a one-man army.

evil/green clothing will be highly customisable, his or her armour and weapon changes being reflected in realtime on their character models, which is always a welcome touch.

As for the plot, the land of Nevendaar is being threatened, due to the Highfather (basically God) not bothering looking after it any more. A mysterious messenger from the heavens called Inoelle, who's an angel of some sort, takes up the torch of freedom against the forces of evil. On her journey, she discovers new emotions that previously were unknown to her, like love, patriotism and a fondness for Pot Noodles

Other leaders she might meet along the way are Lambert, a supreme commander of the Imperial Guard, a demonic warrior called Haarhus and, finally, an elf called Erion, who's probably handy with a bow. It's all shaping up to be one of those sleeper titles that you might just find yourself interested in because of the slew of ridiculous third-person action games blighting the release schedules with their monotony.

"Might just be that game to make turn-based strategy funky again"



CRASHERS

Late 2010 will bring online multiplayer funtimes with Crashers, a mash-up of Twisted Metal and the ill-fated and utterly dead Auto Assault.

LEAVE THE LIGHT ON

Online multiplayer funtimes are to be had with the recently announced Blacklight: Tango Down. Keep an eye on it over at playtangodown.com

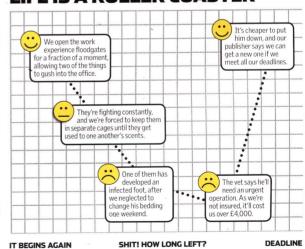
HANDBALL, REF!

If you're a fan of handball you should check out the excitingly titled Handball Challenge Training Camp. Get the demo here: handball-challenge.com





LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER



IT BEGINS AGAIN



Official data compiled by Chart Track

- **COMMAND & CONQUER 4:** TIBERIAN TWILIGHT
 - **DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS AWAKENING**
- **NEW BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2**
- **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**
- **NEW DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING**
- **NEW NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR** Issue 220 - 89
- **NEW METRO 2033**
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- 9
- LEFT 4 DEAD 2
- 10 THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES Issue 215 - 789
- 11 NEW SUPREME COMMANDER 2 Issue 219 - 80%
- 12 **ASSASSIN'S CREED II**
- **ALIENS VS PREDATOR** 13
- **MODERN WARFARE 2**
- **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICHKING**
- 16 DAWN OF WAR II - GOLD
- 17 **DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS**
- 18 MASS EFFECT 2
- **EMPIRE:** TOTAL WAR
- **20 NEW THE STRONGHOLD: COLLECTION**



9. LEFT 4 DEAD 2

Valve's co-op shooter is still popular, more so that Aliens vs Predator, which has slipped and tumbled away



16. DAWN OF WAR II - GOLD

This packs DOW2 and Chaos Rising into one box. Lots of Space Marine goodness and Chaosscilation.



12. ASSASSIN'S CREED II

It's Assassin's Creed, without the crap bits. Lots of stabbing goodness. (Not that we like knives. Knives are bad.)



20. THE STRONGHOLD:

COLLECTION

Five Stronghold games in one box. A huge amount of castling goodness.





OPEN SEASON

Voting for the 2010 Golden Joystick Awards nominations opens soon

WEBSITE goldenjoystick.com

SEASONS CHANGE, GOVERNMENTS

fall, but one thing remains constant: a Golden Joystick Award is still the most prestigious prize in the gaming world. And now you can have your say about which games get shortlisted for the 28th Golden Joystick Awards this year when long list voting opens on 4 May.

Any game released in the last 12 months is eligible, and this year the categories have been changed so that instead of each platform having its own Best Game award, you can now vote for your favourite game in each genre. BioShock 2 for the Best Shooter? Batman: Arkham Asylum for the Best Action Adventure? NBA 2K10 for the Best Sports game? Whatever you want, it's entirely up to you.

Long list voting closes on 1 June so you haven't got a massive amount of



time to pick the games you want to see on the shortlists, so why not close down the porn website you're secretly perusing and type goldenjoystick.com into your URL area to cast your votes and help get your favourite games one step closer to earning one of those precious trophies. Then you can go back to the pornography, happy that you've done your duty by your favourite game. The developers would thank you for it and believe us, they'll all know how hard it is to drag yourself away from those MILFs, you dirty scoundrels.

Windows®. Life without Walls™, CyberPower recommends Windows 7

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UNPOPULAR ACTRESS HATES THINGS

Hypocrite Julie Peasgood joins forces with soil-fingered menace to attack videogames

AMES WILL ALWAYS be misunderstood. There's that partly-excusable and dwindling group: people who've never played games and wrongly imagine them to be context-free episodes of meaningless sadism. But that less culpable group are responsible for the existence of the obnoxious second: publicity hungry pundits and politicians, who'll say anything to get them into the papers, or win votes.

known about her role in horror video game, Martian Gothic: Unification.

A recent study was brought up that proves children playing violent video games were more aggressive, but the relevance of the study is lessened when you rephrase it "Children playing video games they're not legally allowed to buy suffer ill effects."

This brings us back to the point CVG online editor Tim Ingham constantly, and heroically, reiterated: we already

"The implication was, as it always is, drugs and games are equivalent"

Take Julie Peasgood - a tabloid sexpert who was willing to extend her area of authority to include videogames on The Alan Titchmarsh Show, on which she proudly proclaimed she was "categorically against violence for entertainment" and boldly claimed that they promoted racism and depression. The Home Counties crowd might have applauded less enthusiastically had they have a perfectly adequate ratings system for games in place.

But it's not just backwash nan-TV that's at it: that same weekend, the Observer Magazine ran a feature called What Video Games Do To Us. Rather than being a study of what videogames do to us, it was the story of one man who took a pile of cocaine and played Grand Theft Auto IV for a month. The

story was illustrated with pictures of "real gamers", gurning and ugly.

Julie Peasgood

Do shut up.

The implication was, as it always is, drugs and games are equivalent. They hook you in, fill your brain, and leave you grotesque and useless. It's simplistic, manipulative and misleading, wilfully replacing data with a single anecdote. And lost in this whole discussion are the 95% of games that are suitable for children. Pippa Funnell, anyone?

So after a depressingly predictable couple of weeks, it was refreshing to get some good news. As part of the budget, Alistair Darling introduced tax breaks for home-grown videogames. The government now recognises not only that videogames are a legitimate

industry, but also that they carry some artistic merit worthy of subsidy.

Martian Gothic: free of

any kind of violence.

You could argue that the last place that needs a tax break is Rockstar North - but chief executive of trade lobbyist group TIGA explains that the break will pay for itself, with the creation of thousands of graduate-level jobs, greater investment in the industry, and increased output leading eventually to more revenue for the government. Maybe, maybe not - but being offered the same incentives as the movie industry is certainly a sign that the government isn't being led by the screams from Peasgood's floss-haired army of idiots.

It's just a shame that it takes a multibillion dollar industry to make people see that.

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LICO I I I G How you'll be wasting your money in 2010

S WE MOVE further into the year, there's only so much excitement we can spread about before things get sticky and disgusting. We have to conserve our anticipation goo for worthy receptacles, so it's both a pain and a pleasure to see so many great titles be announced at GDC, which you can read about starting on page 40.

Suffice it to say, we're looking forward to crying out in unadulterated ecstasy as we click through the *Monkey Island 2* remake and fumble with our trousers as *F1 2010*'s parents come home early and catch us in a compromising position with their game daughter. As for the other harlots looking to occupy our time, see the exhaustive and accurate (for now) list below.

SPLIT/SECOND

We took a shine to this one last month when we saw it in action. It looked rough around the edges, being only an early build that was in action, but it was clear to see that high octane thrills were bursting out of the screen like multicoloured facehuggers, shoving phallic pipes down our game gullets and infecting us with enthusiasm. It's taken a while for these feelings to gestate properly, but soon we'll know if the excitedly screaming alien that's preparing itself in our

stomachs is a keeper, or one to

toss absent-mindedly into the bin of discarded hopes and dreams. Er, and by that we mean we'll learn if it's any good or not.



ALPHA PROTOCOL

In this day and age, when all it takes for the moral majority to foam at the mouth is hearing that you can machine gun innocent people to death in a videogame, it's good to see some developers taking a less homicidal spin on their shooters. A tweet from Obsidian has claimed it's possible to complete Alpha Protocol without killing a single person.

This probably means the devs took a leaf out of the Batman Crime Fighting Manual: Never kill bad guys. Gas, electrocute, paralyse, terrorise, maim, concuss, fracture, stab, and torture until they wish they were dead, but never kill bad guys.



GAME	PUBLISHER	ETA
GRAND THEFT AUTO: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY	ROCKSTAR	16 APRIL
SHIP SIMULATOR EXTREMES	PARADOX	16 APRIL
THE WHISPERED WORLD	DEEP SILVER	23 APRIL
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION	UBISOFT	30 APRIL
POLE POSITION 2010	KALYPSO	APRIL 2010
SPLIT/SECOND	DISNEY	21 MAY
ACHTUNG PANZER: KHARKOV 1943	PARADOX	28 MAY
ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA	28 MAY
BLUR `	ACTIVISION	28 MAY
LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4	WARNER BROS	28 MAY
PRINCE OF PERSIA: FORGOTTEN SANDS	UBISOFT	28 MAY
SINGULARITY	ACTIVISION	28 MAY
BATTLEFIELD 1943: PACIFIC	EA	SPRING 2010
TOY STORY 3: THE VIDEOGAME	DISNEY	15 JUNE
DARKSTAR ONE: BROKEN ALLIANCE	KALYPSO	25 JUNE
TWO WORLDS: THE TEMPTATION	ZUXXEZ	25 JUNE
MAFIA II	2K GAMES	24 AUGUST

AHEAD OF THE GAME

Take heed readers – this is how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ARMADA OF THE DAMNED	DISNEY	SUMMER 2010
MONKEY ISLAND 2 SE: LECHUCK'S REVENGE	LUCASARTS	SUMMER 2010
STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY	ACTIVISION	SUMMER 2010
DEAD RISING 2	CAPCOM	3 SEPTEMBER
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS	BETHESDA	29 OCTOBER
APB	EA	AUTUMN 2010
ARCANIA: GOTHIC 4	JOWOOD	AUTUMN 2010
CRYSIS 2	EA	AUTUMN 2010
F1 2010	CODEMASTERS	AUTUMN 2010
F.3.A.R.	WARNER	AUTUMN 2010
MEDAL OF HONOR	EA	AUTUMN 2010
THE SECRET WORLD	FUNCOM	AUTUMN 2010
BRINK	BETHESDA	WINTER 2010
CIVILIZATION V	2K GAMES	WINTER 2010
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR	WINTER 2010
NEED FOR SPEED: WORLD	EA	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOICE	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2	NAMCO BANDA	WINTER 2010
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATACLYSM	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
THE AGENCY	SOE	TBA 2010
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2	WARNER BROS	TBA 2010
CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION	BOHEMIA	TBA 2010
COMMANDER: CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS	PARADOX	TBA 2010
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SOE	TBA 2010
DEAD ISLAND	TECHLAND	TBA 2010
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION		TBA 2010
HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE THREE	VALVE	TBA 2010
MAGICKA	PARADOX	TBA 2010
RAGE	EA	TBA 2010

MONKEY ISLAND 2 SPECIAL EDITION

To be honest, what else is there to say about this most amazing, excellent and superb adventure game that hasn't been said before? How about, "We hope that the interface works better than Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition's did"? And we hope that they get the most important thing right –



Guybrush's appearance and, of course, his beard. It doesn't look like they have, judging by the images seen so far, but we can but hope this is rectified as soon as possible.

Other than that, we can't wait to get our hands on this one, reliving the glory of the spitting competition and the conversation about woodchucks all over again.

CRYSIS 2

If you want to know one of the things we're most excited about when it comes to Crytek's bombastic new graphics card-eating game, it might surprise you to learn that slopes are high up on our list of Cool Things In *Crysis 2*. It might seem silly to outsiders for grown men and women to get



excited by characters standing realistically on a slanted surface, but those people just don't understand the pain we've been through over the years, watching our digital brethren air-walk down stairs or kind-of half-float, half-sink into any vaguely angled surface. We welcome the age of the slope and all that it brings with it.

R.U.S.E.	UBISOFT	TBA 2010
SPEC OPS: THE LINE	2K GAMES	TBA 2010
THIEF 4	EIDOS	TBA 2010
TRON: EVOLUTION	DISNEY	TBA 2010
DEAD SPACE 2	EA	EARLY 2011
SWORD OF THE STARS 2	PARADOX	EARLY 2011
STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC	LUCASARTS	SPRING 2011
GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER	UBISOFT	AUTUMN 2011
ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES	SEGA	TBA 2011
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2	UBISOFT	TBA 2011
DIABLO III	ACTIVISION	TBA 2011
WARHAMMER 40,000: THE MMO	THQ	TBA 2012



UPFRONTCOLUMN

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

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JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

Foxes, Photoshop, BISHOPS (



omplicated subjects do my head in. That's why I write about games, because, apart from being the world's most profitable entertainment medium, they're games, so are, by definition, trivial.

I mean, I can get a review wrong. I can lose the confidence of readers. my peers, and become blacklisted by publishers, and suffer endless rotary knees to the nuts of my self-esteem, but it all boils down to saying, "Well, I liked/didn't like it, it was/wasn't fun". Basically, what I'm say is, I'm sorry I overscored Spore.

So, I find it difficult when something slightly intricate comes up that I should have a strong, bold opinion about. For example, I don't know what to think about Ubisoft's new DRM. I know I don't like it, but isn't that just because I'm predisposed to rolling my eyes at the idea of billionaires like Ubisoft aggressively defending themselves against... us? I'm definitely one of the hypocrites who doesn't like fox hunting, basically because it's posh wankers fannying about on horses. But in the pub, I'll dutifully pretend my objections are about the cruelty to them poor dinky raynards.

THE FOXES OF PIRACY

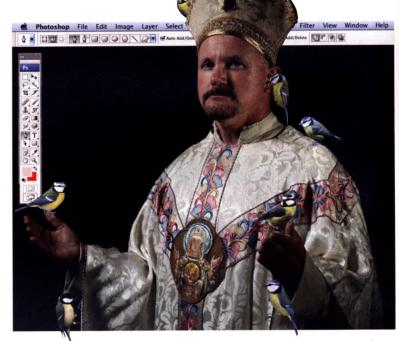
For starters, I don't feel qualified to talk about piracy. Apart from not knowing the facts – like everyone else – how dare I lecture on the evils of piracy when I'm in the luxurious position of being able to phone up a publisher, and say, "Oh hi, I'm writing a feature about excellent games, can I have all your good ones please," knowing they will?

So I can't judge pirates. In some cases, say, if you're skint, and couldn't afford the games any other way, then I'll think "Well, the publisher's not lost a sale, and if it stops you stabbing my nan to get cash, fill your boots."

But if you're a political pirate, then I'm a bit suspicious. I understand people copying Photoshop, because it's priced at a professional level, and most of us only want to put tits on a bishop. If it was a straight choice between buying it and not using it, it'd be simple. We'd just install The Gimp and suffer. I've used hooky Photoshop. But I'd be the last to suggest I was exercising freedom of digital information, and bravely defying the suffocatingly corporation-serving copyright laws of capitalism. I wanted to put tits on a bishop. For free. Even in a society where 70% of people think broadband is a fundamental human right, it's hard to argue that one.

Besides, unlike Photoshop, when you copy a game and play it, it's not like only using the crop tool in a hooky version of *Photoshop*. You're getting the full, intended purpose of the game. Unless you're shit at it, I suppose. Perhaps you should get a discount if you run through shooters without listening to the audio logs, or if you only play Chun Li in Street Fighter. I came to my senses and stopped collecting feathers in Assassin's Creed II at 92% completion. I'd want my 8% rebate.

There's another breed of pirate – you could be one of those filehoarding dicks who wants something just because it's there. In this case,



"In my gut-mind is the idea that DRM is posh twats hunting a wily fox"

your punishment is in-built - you're doomed to a hard drive full of games, music and movies you're "getting around to". It's opulent choice paralysis. I used to have 300 Automation disks for my Atari ST, with around three games on each. I basically played my retail copy of Wizball while my game collection laughed at me from its cupboard.

Somewhere in my gut-mind is the idea that DRM is posh marketing twats hunting a wily and elusive fox. Only in this case there are millions of Freeloading Mr Foxes, and the huntsmen, instead of killing their target, are taking the novel approach of inconveniencing everything that isn't a fox, in the hope that the foxes will be so keen to play *The Settlers 7* that they'll, erm, stop being dashing, cunning, foxes and instead opt for a lifetime of inconvenience, along with everyone else.

As you can tell, I'm confused. And what I do when I'm confused, is listen to other people, and decide whether they're right based on whether or not I like them. So, what do you think? Can you convince me one way or the other? Can someone basically offer me a Simpleton's 101 on the whys and should nots of piracy? This also means I won't have to think of an idea for next month's column, as I'll be answering these. One idea a month, indeed. It's monstrous, what is expected of me.

EMAIL YOUR THOUGHTS TO ME: log@disappointment.com



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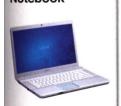
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BILL ROPER,DEVELOPER, WARCRAFT AND HELLGATE

FROM HERO TO VILLAIN

Adam Hartley talks to Bill Roper about his successes and failures

EFORE THE YEAR 2007, Bill Roper was beloved by PC gamers, due to his work on WarCraft, Diablo and StarCraft, Then in 2003 Roper left Blizzard to co-found Flagship Studios, and began working on Hellgate: London. When Hellaate was released, the high hopes of many PC gamers were crushed, and Roper went from beloved to reviled.

Until recently Roper was the Executive Producer of Cryptic Studios' MMO Champions Online. He took a break from fielding job offers to answer a few questions.

> How did you get into the games industry?

Back in 1994 I was working at a photocopying store, doing desktop publishing. I had a good friend who was an artist at Blizzard, and they were looking for somebody to do the music for the PC version of Blackthorne. I also did some voiceover work for a demo reel they were taking to that summer's Consumer Electronics Show (CES). I also helped to write the script for the first WarCraft - sitting with Blizzard's sound guy in his tiny closet office and coming up with all those original ideas for the universe.

Back then Blizzard was very much a meritocracy, so if you were able to show that you had the ability to do something then you were given the chance to give it a try. Which shows how very different the industry was at that time. I quickly went from this guy that came in to do funny voices and bits of music to the one who created the backstory for the WarCraft universe!

How do you direct and manage a large creative team?

Things work very differently for every team that you work with. I find that most theories of management tend to be about understanding what works naturally in a team that has excellent communication and the ability to look towards a common goal. Keep lists of things. Get a box of Bud! As a manager there is no substitute for wandering around the team and just saying: "How's it going? What are you working on?"

Blizzard grew rapidly through the '90s. How did gaming change then?

Through the '90s the PC started to become less expensive and more popular, infiltrating the home, so we started recognising that there was an opportunity. And the area that we were able to latch onto was that there was a connectivity with PCs that simply

to what today's players expect from their PC games.

Just looking at the amount of traffic around Battle.net when Diablo and StarCraft first launched was a huge indicator that we were doing things right and that we were tapping into something that was in the process of explodina.

Fast-forwarding to the last few vears, vou've had vour own ups and downs with Hellgate: London.



"There are certain things that Blizzard does that we tried that failed"

didn't exist on consoles. This was always a major focus for Blizzard: "How do we use this connectivity?"

That whole concept of playing with someone else from anywhere in the world was revolutionary at the time that Battle.net launched. It was very forward-thinking.

Were there any particular 'Oh my God!' moments?

Yeah, I remember when we shipped the original WarCraft. At one point they upped the order to 125,000 for the initial shipping total. And that was just insane back then - it was a crazy number. We started to think: "Wow! Maybe this is gonna work."

Then WarCraft II just took off in a way that no-one expected. I mean, we did it in about 11 months. And I think if you looked back and played the game now it would seem very short compared

Hellgate: London was very much a roller coaster ride. I was fortunate enough to be able to start up my own company with a talented bunch of individuals. And I think that maybe the thing that was the most difficult for us to overcome was that there was such an amazingly high degree of expectation from our company and from that game.

We raised the expectations for the game to unobtainable heights. By the time *Hellgate* launched the expectation was that it was going to change the face of PC gaming. Fans and reviewers were actually saying that!

So the team's rep from working at Blizzard was a bit of a millstone?

Yes. We had gained a lot from growing up with Blizzard, but there are certain things that Blizzard does that we tried that failed. You know, Blizzard can work on a game and they can decide that they are going to take six years to develop it if they want to, because they have the support and finance, and they could say: "You know what, we are going to need another year on this." That's extremely rare - if not unique - in the industry.

However, when that is how you grow up, then that is how you think. You shoot for the moon. You go for the big home run. You just keep iterating until it is ready to go.

How was the Hellgate experience for you personally?

The thing that really disappointed and saddened me was that it went beyond the "Hey, you guys made a game and I thought it was crap" posts to personal attacks on people.

This bizarre thought process somehow suggested that we did things specifically to screw our players. As if we were all sat around plotting what we could do next that would really make them angry. No developer thinks that!

It was really exciting though, don't get me wrong. Certainly that was the first major entrepreneurial step that I'd taken, in terms of being there from day one, creating

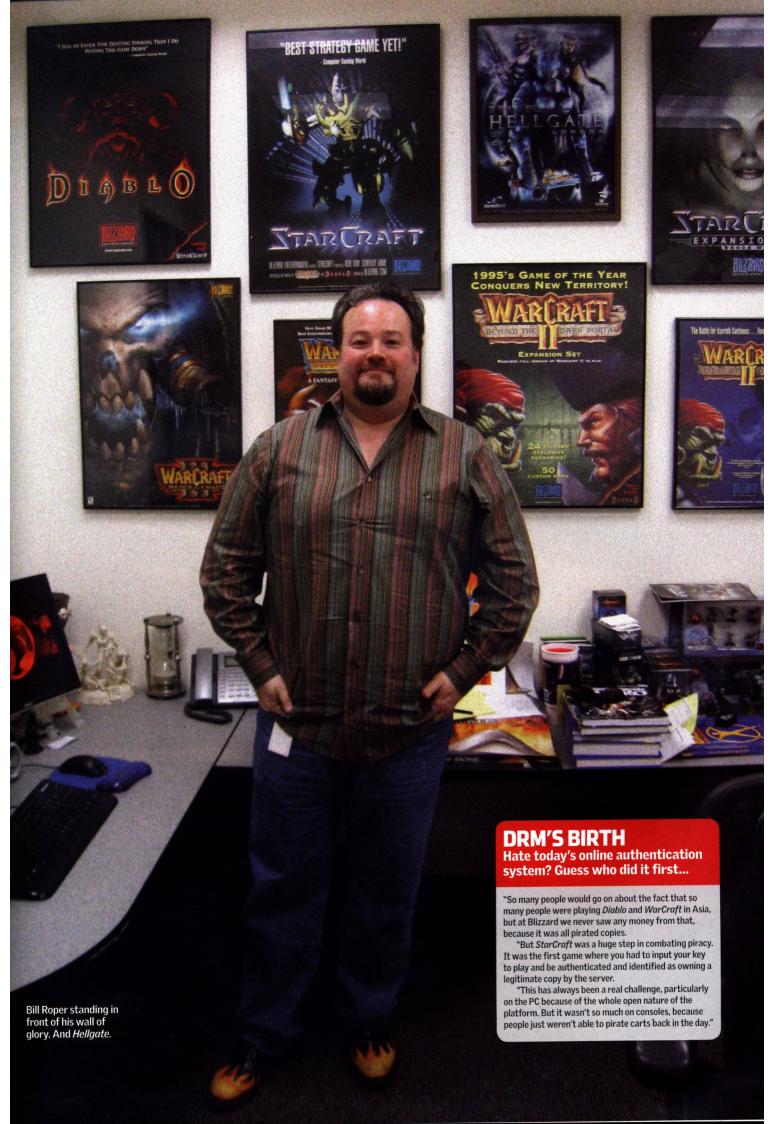
something from the ground up, both from the game standpoint and in terms of the company.

I'd never trade that experience. Even with the fact that we ended up failing so spectacularly.

What have you learned from your 16 years of making PC games?

That very connectivity that helped the PC to explode, becoming a massively popular games machine in the first place, now feeds into our greatest challenge, as there's now such a high bar for developers to hit when creating a PC game.

But that's exactly what still makes PC gaming all so exciting, It's that challenge that keeps me motivated as a developer, and so enthusiastic about going to work every day. What we do is so hugely different now from back in 1994. And that's the exciting part.



UPFRONTHOTSHOTS



F1 2010

DEVELOPER Codemasters **PUBLISHER** Codemasters **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/fl_2010 ETA September 2010

VERYONE CRAMMED INTO the nightclub Codies were using ■ to showcase their new Formula 1 game said the same thing: "I haven't played an F1 game for years, but I really liked those Geoff Crammond ones from way back."

If those games are still the nostalgic benchmark for F1 racing simulators, it's a sad state of affairs. Someone needs to take the dusty crown, give it a real good polish and bring F1 gaming into the here and now.

Codies, using the EGO engine that makes other games like Colin McRae's DiRT and Race Driver: GRID look so delicious, are hoping they can finish in pole position with this one.

F1 2010 certainly looks pretty and from experience we can also say that it's incredibly difficult when played with a wheel and with the in-game driving aids all disabled.

At least, the sum total of PC ZONE's efforts failed to make it round a single lap without all the wheels coming off.





2. LICENCE FEE

As you'd expect from an official product, this'll have all the bumph, paraphernalia and gubbins from a licensed title. Meticulously detailed and accurate cars, the proper drivers, teams and circuits. That means you can fulfil the wish of Formula 1 fans everywhere and drive Michael Schumacher's car straight into a wall, crushing his bones into paste and leaving him in a pile of twisted metal and wreckage. Or just win races easily, your call.

3. THE LONG HAUL

Codies are promising an "extensive and challenging" career mode, which will allow you to create a new driver (we assume) and rise from the bottom of the ranks, joining and switching teams and eventually becoming the guy who can't lose because his car's miles better than everyone else's. And what could be closer to the true spirit of F1 than that?

4. WEATHER REPORT

Rain plays a big part in the Formula 1 season, so it'll be important to simulate the effects of liquid on tarmac accurately, otherwise Codies will be sure to feel the wrath of many an aggrieved F1 nutcase. The most advanced weather system in any driving game is what's promised and who are we to argue with a press release.

5. POLE POSITION

You don't want to make the pit stop, but in F1 2010 perhaps it'll be more fun than usual. Codies say they are working to make the whole pit lane experience "tense and exciting" as your shiny motor is polished and worked over by a gang of faceless nobodies in overalls. We'd love a 'realism' mode where a grease-stained mechanic comes over to Schumacher, looks his car up and down, sucks in air through his teeth, and then tells him the parts won't be in for two weeks and that he'll have to wait. That would be amazing.







A NEW SEASON

Soccer-mad David Brown takes a look Football Manager Live's reboot

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive **PUBLISHER** SEGA **WEBSITE** footballmanagerlive.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** Issue 205

ET'S TAKE A look at what we said way back in issue 205 about Football Manager Live: "Sports Interactive haven't yet managed to kill off the scourge of the obsessive MMOer". Now, more than a year later, FML is on the verge of a reboot with those MMOers being one of the major reasons behind the decision.

Sports Interactive's guru of all things *FML*, Marc Duffy, believes the reasons behind the game stalling and the subsequent drop off in player numbers are threefold. Firstly, there were the elite players who became unbeatable because

THE LOWDOWN

It's Football Manager

Much fairer balance

Simplified pricing

Much improved opponent AI

Bloody complicated

of the structure of the game. They sucked up all the best players, both young and old, pricing everyone else out of the transfer market, and dominated everything to do with the game.

DOMINANT FC

"When we did analysis last year," admits Duffy, "we found that most of the teams in the top 100 in any game world had been there since day one, and had accumulated the most money, so there wasn't a hope in hell that anyone was ever going to catch them. This meant nobody wanted to join those game worlds, and if we wanted to keep a game world going for 10, 15, 20 seasons, we had no chance of attracting people."

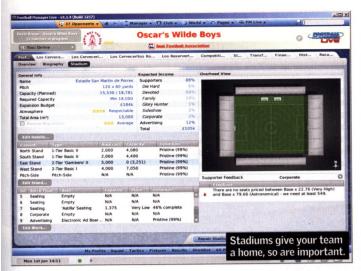
Secondly, there was the error in judgement that lead SI, perhaps excited about player numbers in the initial phases of the game's life, to open far more servers and game worlds than necessary. Every time one got to 70% of

capacity, another new one would be opened. After a while, players began to leave the older worlds, making them effectively ghost towns where the elite would rule over an empire of few subjects. The new worlds would then be decimated by veteran players employing all the fast-track tactics made popular on servers, leading to the process of domination beginning again.

As you can imagine, when there's no prospect of non-elite players advancing

or building even a reasonably successful team, especially when you're paying for the privilege of basically failing constantly, numbers began to slide. The third issue that compounded the other two was that just mentioned: price. The minimum subscription model you could go for was a £24/quarter affair. Players who just wanted to try the game out for a little bit to see if they liked it were left out in the cold somewhat. A year-long subscription for over £70 also proved







perplexing to a lot of potential players, who naturally refused to countenance such an outlay on a game. Consider that the majority of Football Manager players play only that game, and maybe a basic selection of blockbuster titles as well, and you can understand the difficulties of pitching a project like FML to them without a short-term trial option.

PRICED OUT

"When we went for the hard launch in January 2009, that [£72.99 for one year] was the price every potential player saw and they just went 'I'm not going to pay that much for a game," Duffy laments.

"The minimum you could pay for was three months, so anyone who just wanted to come along and try out the game had to pay £24. Originally, we wanted the game to cost two pints a month, but it ended up being two pints in Norway rather than the UK."

But hope is around the bend, with a new beginning for the game. A reboot that, with all football puns that could be applied to that word ignored, could really lift it off the bench and back onto the online pitch as a viable contender for your readies. For a start, there'll be two ways to play it: Fantasy and Returning Stars. The former is a completely randomised world, where no names are real and only your abilities and listscouring will be able to sort the Djimi Traores from the Torben Piechniks.

The Returning Stars will be for those not necessarily wanting to compete with the FML elite, with real footballers and a very promising draft system that grants bonuses to new and weak players. Essentially, after every season, certain older stars retire and are reborn in the game at the same age they are in reality, with updated stats to reflect their age.

The players with the worst teams, or who've just entered the game, will get the highest draft picks - the worst team will get the best reborn, and the 10th worst team will be given the 10th best reborn player. Conversely, the best teams and players will be miles down the list,





and will get the worst of the reborns, meaning theirs might just be some no-mark

SI are hoping this and the other changes designed to keep the world vibrant and relatively equalised will encourage people to stay in the game, even if they did terribly in a season.

The addition of youth academies helps this along too. The best teams will not be able to sign all the best players the second they appear in the game, as they'll only be created in clubs' academies, so teams will all have a good chance of unearthing a new Leo Messi. They can then choose to sell them for big money or use them to improve their own team.

This is certainly a step in the right direction, focusing on renewing the challenge every season for all players, experienced, successful or not. New players will feel their big chance will be

FRANKENSTEIN FOOTBALLERS

the same balance as the Returning Stars world, SI are using real-world players to create the ones in Fantasy worlds. To do this SI take a real player – like Ronaldo – from its database to make a footballer from the same country with the same level of overall skill. But this Fantasy player might specialise in a different position (say defence rather than forward in Ronaldo's case), and will get new stats. A new Fantasy player's abilities will be adjusted for their nationality (eg. South American footballers get better technical skills), position (a defender's marking will be increased, even if they were based on a striker) and age (old players are smarter, younger players fitter). Finally they're given a random name and they're ready to play.

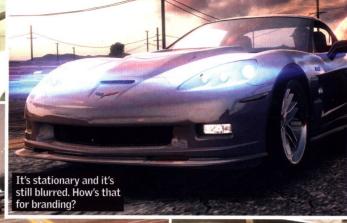
> a season away, while the best will have to deal with surging newcomers looking to strip them of their crowns.

Competition is what is key for a game like FML. Before the reboot, the odds were stacked in favour of those who invested the most time into the game. This time, everyone has a chance - at least, much more so than before. The future looks significantly brighter than it used to for Football Manager Live. Oh, and there's going to be a new 3D match mode too.

"The best teams will not be able to sign all the best players"

UPFRONTHANDS-ON





CARTS FOR ADULTS...

"Who says power-ups in racers can't be fun?" asks *Andy Robinson*

HEN IT WAS seen last year, Blur was a bit average. But 12 months make all the difference in the wonderful world of game development, and Liverpool-based Bizarre Creations - responsible for the excellent Project Gotham Racing series - has put some roar back into its racer's whimpering exhaust.

On paper Blur is Project Gotham Racing blended with Mario Kart. However, Bizarre have now clearly decided to make a racer that lies at the Mario end of the spectrum - and it's all the more fun for it.

Firing Shunt – a sort of electric red shell - is now a violent, satisfying barrel roll of death cast on your unlucky

THE LOWDOWN

- Bizarre comes to PCs
- Massively intense
- Balanced power-ups
- Call of Duty perks
- Mario Kart with BMWs?

motorcar target, and, like the Mario Kart projectile, you can fire it backwards in your chasing opponents' faces, which is ever so satisfying. Likewise dropping a mine, unlike the dull tin cans in last year's build, now casts an angry and massive black hole waiting to explode in the faces of any unlucky BMW that drifts into its path; while getting annihilated by a first placehoming Shock inches from the finish line is now part and parcel of the experience. All of these attacks on your car will leave you shouting and swearing at your

ETA

28 MAY 2010

"On paper Blur is Project Gotham Racing blended with Mario Kart"

monitor, while grinning wildly.

Having the acclaimed racing house finally pick a side of the fence is great to see. Last year's game had a clear identity crisis as Bizzare attempted to please both hardcore fans and less corner-carving savvy gamers, and ended up satisfying no-one at all. This year's Blur is slick, focused and smartly edited.

The cars handle well too: ignore the Mario influence and you'll believe you're behind the wheel in a proper arcade racer. The selection of motors on offer range from slick speedsters, drift-happy muscle cars, and the obligatory roughand-tumble jeeps and vans.

But it'd be naive to expect

players can dodge them.

the creator of five highly praised

racing games to simply pump out a

mindless mum-and-dad Kart entry:

limit their payload to a few yards in

front of the lead car, meaning skilled

power-ups are clearly well-balanced and

abilities (like the aforementioned Shock)

The most impressive aspect of Blur's race is the sheer physical oomph of

battling 19 other vehicles - and their magical zapping skills – around Hackney (ves. that's one of the race courses). The traditional first corner pile-up was simply one of the most intense racing experiences we've had: Audis being blasted out of existence, and scenery thrown 10 feet in the air - it's mental.

The boosted driver count means that Blur is a racer in which your opponents are never far away. In fact, most of the time they'll be scratching up your body work, trying to send you flying into a lake or a corner shop with the Force Push-like Barge.

One of the most promising aspects of this game, compared to the likes of Split/Second, is its excellent off-thecourse functions, which, unusually,

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STREET KINGS



BATMAN RETURNS



ACTIBLIZZ



includes plenty of stuff inspired by Modern Warfare 2. Like the current king of the FPS genre, Blur includes game changing perks (called 'Mods'), Challenges and experience points for levelling up and unlocking goodies.

MODDING RACER

Mods include the defensive (less damage from collisions), offensive (get a Nitro for performing a superb drift), and all-round useful (a Predator Cloak for your car – great in the *Destruction* Derby-esque Motor Mash mode). One we found particularly handy glued a laser sight to our rear-view mirror perfect for backwards Shunt blasts.

Like Infinity Ward's shooter, Blur now does an excellent job of constantly rewarding the player, with virtual pats on the back every time you take out a rival or pull off a skilful Mine throw onto an opponent's bonnet.

Bizarre Creations is definitely back on track for its mission of make racing games fun again. On the road Blur is a great laugh to play and outside races the impressive array of community and customisation features add depth to the package. Last year's game was a nebulous, indistinct meshing together of two conflicting types of racing games. In 2010 however, Blur looks like it won't live up to its name.



Fantasy RPGs are legally obliged to contain goblins.

ETA AUTUMN 2010

ADOW AT THE RE

Steve Hill goes to Germany in search of goblins...

Spellbound Entertainment

HAT IS IT about the Germans and their technical questions? When Michelangelo unveiled the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel to the assembled press, did a German art journalist stick up his hand and ask how many tins of paint it took? Seems unlikely, but when Germans are involved there's always some earnest berk who seems obsessed with how many pixels and polygons a particular game has. They don't realise it doesn't matter.

Thankfully, the German press couldn't make it to the unveiling of Arcania, which was held at the offices

of Spellbound, its developer, in a bleak industrial estate on the banks of the Rhine, where the obligatory yellow Ferrari sticks out like a sore thumb. Welcome to Kehl, where the best thing is the bridge to Strasbourg, and the second best is the 24-hour McDonalds.

The obvious question is why are Spellbound developing Arcania, given that the puntastically-named Piranha Bytes made the first three instalments. If it's somehow passed you by, the Gothic series consists of what used to be known as 'real ale' RPGs, where orcs and goblins stroll a mystical fiddle-de-de land, and dungeons full of unspeakable beasts await smiting from a suitably

hirsute hero. All beards and bluster, Gothic was littered with monsters, swords, sorcery, leather, barrels, magic and everything else that makes the genre so derided. Yet despite near Hasselhoff levels of popularity in its native Germany, this hardcore RPG series has yet to make an impact elsewhere, and is largely known for being riddled with serious bugs.

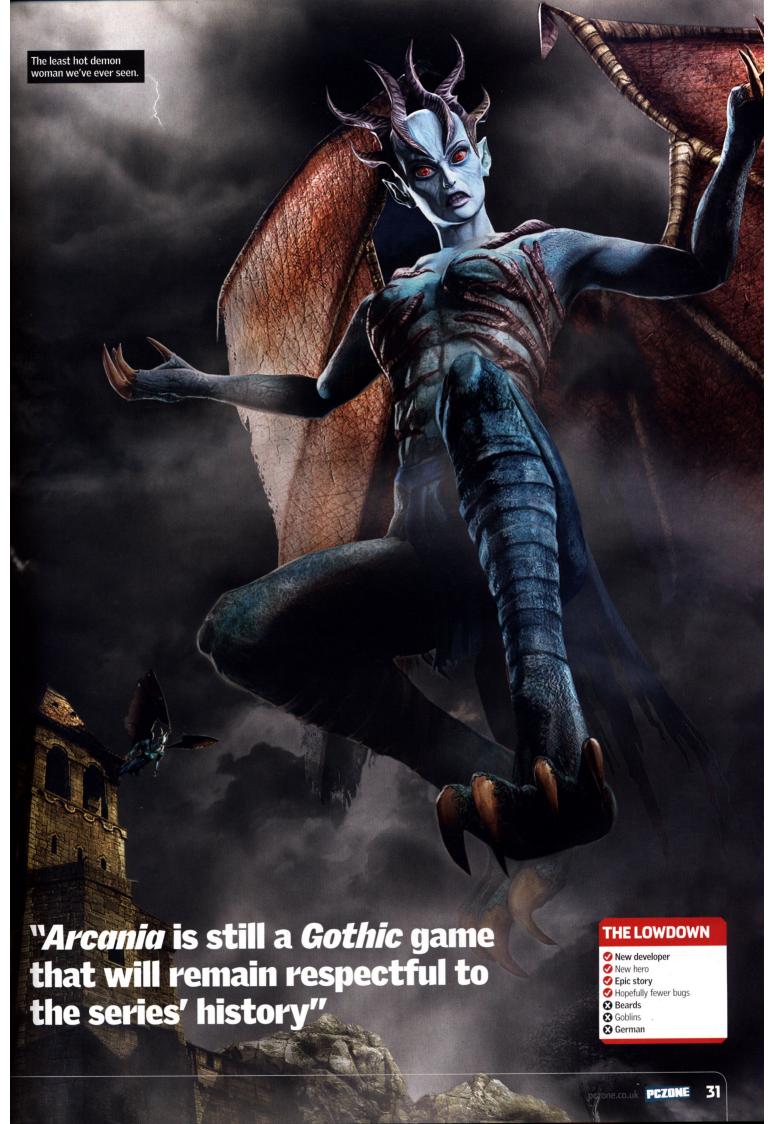
NEW DEV, NEW START

Either way, Piranha Bytes are off the case, and Spellbound are in, selected from some 30 budding developers largely on the basis of a demo of forthcoming orc-'em-up, Ravendale.

Development on Arcania began around three years ago and has been somewhat chaotic, with key personnel leaving, a number of name changes, and the game almost being canned at one point. With the release date extended, it would appear to be back on track, and is presented in what is referred to as midalpha stage. Given the heritage of the series, this must be like stepping into a dead man's shoes, but the key message is that Arcania is still a Gothic game that will remain respectful to the series' history.

Everyone has had dates like these, right?

> "We wouldn't want to completely copy Piranha Bytes,"











OTHIC 3
he series officially
ecomes a trilogy. Still
ugged to buggery.

ARCANIA
Spellbound set out
developing and the

2



predecessor, which focus groups have revealed to be simply too unwieldy even for seasoned goblin-fanciers. This *Gothic* should be more tightly packed, with far less to-ing and fro-ing between quests, and each route allegedly offering new stuff to do.

If you know what you're doing, Spellbound reckons you'd be able to plough through the core quests in 15 to 20 hours. However, if you want to get stuck into the side-quests, you can probably double that again.

As for the story, it's the timehonoured business of your peaceful idyll being shattered by the ugly spectre of war. Coming home to find your village looted and pillaged, and the aggressors making good their escape by boat, it's down you to man up and get involved. There's also a mysterious love interest, and familiar characters will reappear, including stalwart Diego, who's similarly intent on revenge. Some of the classic weapons from the series will reappear, enabling melee and range combat, along with the trademark fireball and a whiff of magic. Pinpointing the combat as one of the weaknesses of the previous games, sizeable improvements have been made in that area.

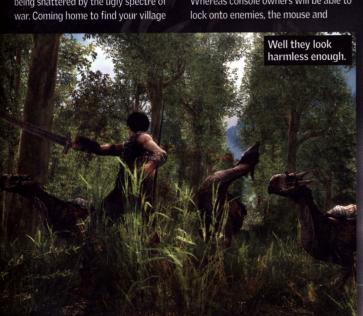
"The combat is way more fastpaced," said Beccu. "In previous versions it was more like waiting until there was a gap in the enemy's defence. Right now it's about initiative, choosing strategy, adapting to what kind of enemies there are and changing it on the fly if it doesn't work."

While you can specialise in particular areas, Spellbound are being careful to ensure that you don't paint yourself into a corner, and you should be able to comfortably progress through the game whatever your talents. There's also the obligatory crafting, enabling you to make a fancy weapon or simply knock up a delicious feast. And you may have to appease the Gods of Earth, Wind and Fire (or something), choose sides in an epic battle and make some soul-searching moral decisions.

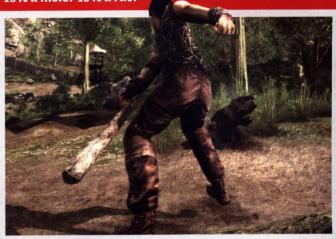
THIS IS HARDCORE

So far, so RPG. Unbelievers won't care, and *Gothic* aficionados will be wary of the new developer, and particularly the "new audience" they speak of.

A sizeable bulk of those newcomers will be enjoying the game for the first time on an Xbox 360, but we're assured that the game will remain loyal to its PC roots. We are shown both versions, with a key difference coming in the combat. Whereas console owners will be able to lock onto enemies, the mouse and



KILL ALL RODENTS Is it a mole? Is it a rat?



Amidst the myriad RPG clichés, the relentless extermination of the local rat population has long been a mainstay of the genre. Not in *Arcania* however, where the tables have been turned by the inclusion of something called a mole rat, which a quick look on Google has just revealed to be a stomach-churningly horrendous wrinkly hairless actual creature.

Using official documents from the previous games, Spellbound have come up with their own interpretation of what a mole rat would look like in the sunnier climes of the Southern Islands, as hinted at in previous games. So before you mercilessly club it to death in return for a minor XP boost, do be sure to check out its suntan.

keyboard brigade will be offered a more skill-based affair requiring precise timing. Spellbound make a comparison with *Modern Warfare 2*, whereby the console controls in that game snap to the target and those of the PC requiring manual aiming. That's probably the only time *MW2* will be compared to *Arcania*, which looks to be, like its ancestors, a defiantly niche experience, albeit not overwhelmingly so. Despite the simultaneous Xbox release, Spellbound are quick to dismiss any notions of their game being designed to appease a console audience.

"If you want it to be a challenge it definitely is a challenge," says Beccu. "It's got a completely PC only interface. If you want to be as 'Gothic' as possible, you simply disable all the help, choose the highest difficulty and it will be really hard. The difference with the previous titles is that it will still be pretty fair so it doesn't expect you to know things from the first or second playthrough. You can beat it on the first one without dying 50 times in a row, but it will be extremely hard nonetheless."

In Germany, Gothic is almost a byword for hardcore and Spellbound concede that the core values that make the series popular in its homeland are precisely those that make it unpopular elsewhere else. Nevertheless they're



remaining true to those values, and, in a nod to hardcore fans, will be including help-free quests where you'll simply have to wander around aimlessly, talk to everyone you can, and presumably remember what they said. Furthermore, there will be some well-hidden items that you can only gain access to by solving puzzles, finding levers to open secret rooms, and generally being busy.

Even during our extensive first look at *Arcania*, we would appear to have only scratched the surface. The game's true depth will be revealed later this year, but the franchise would appear to be in safe hands, mainly belonging to a bunch of blokes sat in windowless rooms punching ones and zeroes into a bank of computers.

Hopefully they won't make too many mistakes and turn it into a bug-riddled mess, something we jovially mentioned as an icebreaker. The deadpan Germanic response: "That is not something we are trying to emulate."

"In Germany, *Gothic* is almost a byword for hardcore"



BACK TO THE FUTURE...

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FORGOTTEN SANDS

David Brown always preferred the Prince's old pyjamas look

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE prince-of-persia.uk.ubi.com

F YOU'RE GETTING to a place in long-running series where you have to call your game an 'interquel', it might be time to think about just moving on to something new, rather than slotting new games in between old ones like some horrific dusty sequel sandwich.

THE LOWDOWN

- Ocontinues Sands of Time
- Elemental powers
- Lots of combat
- No pyjamas
- Likely to have annoying DRM

'Interquel' is a bastardisation of English Ubisoft PRs invented to describe this new Prince of Persia game. Its release is being timed to coincide with the release of the blockbuster Prince of Persia movie coming out next month. You've probably heard about it already, as your female friends have likely been spamming their Facebook feeds with pictures of the film's Prince - Jake Gyllenhaal - sporting a washboard stomach and chiselled pecs.

We won't be anywhere near an cinema in May though, if Ubisoft get their way. We might just be pinned to our chairs, fixated by the site of a non-Gyllenhaal Prince vamping it up on our

monitors in classic, non cel-shaded Prince of Persia style. Interestingly enough, the game's plot isn't that of the film, instead it goes all the way back to the Sands of Time trilogy, which ended in 2005 with The Two Thrones. This one, The Forgotten Sands, goes further back, as it's set between the events of the first (Sands of Time) and the second (Warrior Within) games. Hence 'interquel'.

Story-wise, this means the developers can't do anything too dramatic with the universe. After all, how would they then

explain everything getting back to 'normal' in the second and third games? So, instead, the Prince is sticking to his tried-and-tested scenario - the kingdom is under devastating attack, and timewarping sand is needed to save everyone.

As such, he can rewind time straight away. There's no messing about with contrived explanations of why you haven't got access to the time warp powers, you just do, right from the getgo. It'd be boring (aka 'the same') if he just did the same things as before, so

"The Prince is sticking to his tried-and-tested scenario"

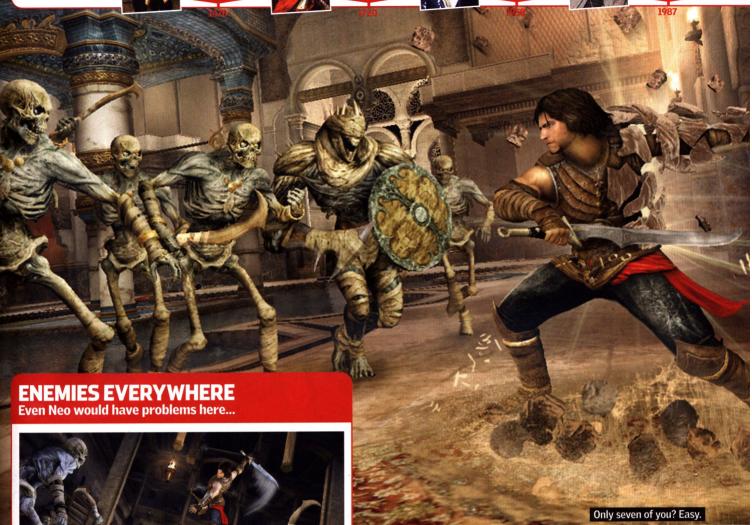














As you can see, foes will not be thin on the ground. To succeed you'll have to use the environment to your advantage. Here, you can imagine the possibilities of using an earthquake attack on the ground, sending all the skeletons flying about as they're repulsed by a shockwave. Alternatively, he could unleash his Tornado power, buffeting the boney bastards all over the shop. It's certainly going to be interesting to see what sort of amazing abilities the Prince will have as he takes on groups of 50 or so soldiers.

Ubisoft are giving him a load of new elemental powers to learn throughout the rest of the game. One of these will be a freezing ability, so, for example, you could stop a water fountain in time so you could climb it. This is a water-based power, so we're interested to see what the other elemental ones bring in terms of gameplay-changing mechanics.

As well as these core powers, there are also some more minor abilities, which can be obtained from a Djinn named Razia. This guy will operate as the obligatory salesman/shop guy that every action game released nowadays seems to need, setting his stall up in an alternate

dimension. Not the handiest of places, but it makes it easy to explain how the Prince can access him at any time.

LOADSABADDIES

The other core thing about the new Prince games (aside from parkour) is the combat. There'll be no shortage of it in The Forgotten Sands. At times, you'll be fending off up to 50 enemies at once, although the emphasis won't always be on killing them all, but on evasion and crowd control. Summoners conjure up fresh enemies as long as they're left alive, so prioritising enemies on sight is essential here. It's going to be a quickpaced affair, with no blocking at all, so you're going to have to be nimble if you want to avoid taking damage

Powers bought from the Djinn can also be used, such as Shield (a wind based power capable of knocking back enemies) which can be fully upgraded to Tornado, a room-filling blast that kills those nearest to you and knocks others to the floor. Toppling enemies is key to success here, as once foes are in the dirt the prince can quickly assassinate them.

Elemental magic suggests interaction with different elemental areas - fire suggests lava, earth forests and so on though so far only the usual gamut has been on display, your baths, prisons and palaces. What we know is that, potential DRM issues aside, this could be a shot in the arm for the series after the less-wellreceived previous game.

We're certainly more enthusiastic about it than we are about the film, at any rate.





shooter *Dead Rising 2* might be a new phenomenon for PC gamers, but with fresh and startling reassurances from Capcom's PRs that they'd mutilate their own feet if the PC didn't get a concurrent release, it's nice to think that as Ubisoft drift from PC gamers' favour, Capcom

Especially because *Dead Rising 2* throws so many zombies onto the screen. At one point, I found myself riding a chainsaw-equipped motorbike through a mass of over 2,000 of them.

THE LOWDOWN

might be coming closer.

- On the PC, at last
- Gloriously absurd
- Oco-op a welcome bonus
- 🗸 Great MP mini-game collection
- Lost core horror



Both the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360 versions handle the game's sheer volume of grey flesh admirably, but this sort of tech showboating is what the PC was made for.

ZOMBIE GAMING

So, here's the story so far: in the first game, photo-journalist Frank West went to Willamette to discover a shopping mall overrun with zombies. His only mission was to find out what was going on. In the process, he ended up escorting dozens of survivors to safety, confronting the psychopaths

who thrive in a world gone dead, and ploughing his way through crowds of milling, lunging, and groaning zombies.

Left 4 Dead this most certainly wasn't – not least because it pre-dated Valve's classic by over two years. These were slow zombies – Romero classics – proof that there's still room for ponderous, inevitable doom in the modern age of sprinty biters. Basically, Simon Pegg would approve.

This time, the star is Chuck Greene. Here's what we know about the story. He's taken his family to Fortune City to take part in the gameshow, *Terror Is Reality*. It seems that mankind has adjusted to the ever-present zombie menace by using them as cannon fodder in a murderous gameshow. We can only assume there was an escape, because Fortune City has now turned into zombieland.

Multiplayer was absent in the first game, but the sequel has been given Resident Evil 5 drop-in, drop-out co-op, and the chance to play through the













Guitar Hero: Zombies.

Inevtiable really.

ZOMBIES AROUND THE WORLD Global zombie no-nos

On the wall of Blue Castle's office is a chart of what you can and can't do with and to zombies around the world. For example, did you know zombie nipples are a naughty no-no in Korea? Or that Japanese players won't put up with any kind of severing animation?



DISMEMBERMENT

NOT ALLOWED IN JAPAN

No wonder Capcom shipped it out to a Western developer. That's the whole point of zombies...

NPC WALKING AROUND WITH WEAPONS STUCK OUT OF HIM

OK EVERYWHERE

In fact, an individual zombie can get pierced or saddled with up to four items. I saw one with three: a barrel, a mask, and an arrow.

GIVING A SEVERED BODY PART TO AN NPC NOT IN JAPAN OR AUSTRALIA

Oh, come on, that's the definition of World of Warcraft!

CHILD TURNING INTO A ZOMBIE

NOT OK ANYWHERE

Sadly, there'll be no pregnant women giving birth to raging zombabies. Movies are allowed that, but we're not.

STAMPING ON A CRAWLING NPC'S HEAD

NOT OK IN JAPAN

Crawling seems to have a strange significance in Japan, as it's only allowed as a sign of injury.

NAKED ZOMBIES

NOT OK ANYWHERE

But zombies have no need for clothing, so surely it makes sense for them all to be naked!

ZOMBIE NIPPLES

NOT OK IN KORFA

What's up with nips, Korea? You've all had one in your mouth, why not cop a dead one in the eye?

ZOMBIE NIPPLES SEEN THROUGH CLOTHING

At least we know what's globally decent now. Thanks, consensus!

ATTACKING PEOPLE WITH SEVERED BODY PARTS

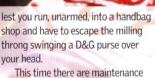
NOT OK IN JAPAN, KOREA, OR AUSTRALIA

So that means Japan and Australia might not be able to use the Dynomeat – a delicious severed hand that attracts zombies and blows up when eaten?

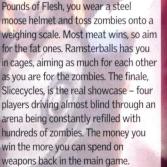
INJECTING CHILDREN WITH STUFF

OK EVERYWHERE

This surprisingly permissive attitude comes with one disappointing proviso: it has to be obvious that the thing being injected is medicine. Boo.



rooms, which let you experiment with combining items. Canoe paddles and chainsaws make a sweet combo, as do electric drills and buckets. And if you resent the zombies having all the hatwearing fun, the Super Slicer has spinning blades on a LEGO head, allowing you to run headdown through a



And dear sweet mercy, those weapons. The first game forced you to remember where everything was,

Gladiators-style games of Terror Is

Reality. This is sheer, stupid fun – in



new look.

And all this, while retaining the first game's 72 Hour Møde – a simple but effective way of encouraging players to become intimately acquainted with the locations, while rewarding persistence by making you constantly stronger. Not many people solve the mystery on the first attempt, and no-one gets the best ending. But when you start over – or simply give up and start again – you'll keep all your extra health, inventory slots, speed, strength, and special moves. And then, you'll earn more.

Dead Rising 2 is everything a sequel should be. It removes the

problems of the first game (that one-save limit certainly added to the dread, but it could be a real pain in the dick) and massively amplifies the wild, childish humour and solemn dread that made the first game so memorable. It's difficult to judge how well Blue Castle might have retained the original's sense of fear and doom, as our hands-on experience was purely with a powered-up Chuck. But the Canadian devs are clearly huge fans of the original, and they're having a great time making the sequel. You can't help but fall in-love with that.



HARD MEN, NO HAIR...

ETA AUGUST 2010 KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

Better, no doubt, than a ferret fortnight reckons *Mike Channell*

DEVELOPER IO Interactive **PUBLISHER** Square Enix **WEBSITE** kaneandlynch.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 217

HE PLOT OF the first Kane & Lynch was almost as unhinged as its pill-popping psycho star Lynch. Starting off as a Michael Manninspired crime caper, it hit players with a crunching third act gear change that switched from gritty urban slay-

> grounds to plugging an army of

mercenaries in Havana and orienteering through the jungles of Venezuela. The game couldn't have been any more schizophrenic if it had featured a horse juggling mini-game and insisted on referring to Kane as Sheila in every third mission. Come to think of it, that might actually have pushed its score up.

IO reckon that for the sequel, they had to make the choice between these two sides of the game's personality: either plumping for a military shooter focussed on Kane's mercenary background or

going for the seedy underbelly of a modern metropolis. Thankfully they decided to take the action to Shanghai rather than farting out an insipid camoclad clone of Modern Warfare.

One thing that hasn't been clear up until now is whether the game's distinctive, YouTube aping shakey-cam style would cause us to blast vomit all over our monitors the first time we dared to finger the sprint button.

NO BARF HERE

Having now had a chance to play the game for ourselves, we can officially confirm that your lunch should stay safely contained in your digestive tract; unless you're rocking the kind of hangover that can only be cured by injecting bacon directly into your heart. That doesn't mean K&L's shaky cam isn't

disorientating, and occasionally we

THE LOWDOWN

- Unique visual style
- Crisp gunplay
- No sickbag required
- Will the novelty wear off?
- Some graphics rudimentary

He looks more like a vampire than that kid from *Twilight*.

















had to slow down to avoid clumsily staggering into doorframes as we legged it through the levels. Fortunately as soon as you bring your gun up to take aim, the game knocks off the juddering nonsense and becomes a crisp and pacey cover shooter.

In a way the switch is almost too rapid, as if you make quick direction changes behind cover, Lynch dashes back and forth like an overexcited kitten. This responsiveness is no doubt something we'll be thankful for in the long run, but in our first five minutes of play, we didn't feel like a particularly slick hitman.

As for the rest of the visual treatment, it's pervasive but never obtrusive. Even the cutscenes are riddled with the kind of jump cuts you see on badly edited home movies. During one sequence we were shown, an entire conversation is filmed from a camera resting on the back seat

of a car.

co-op mode - Fragile Alliance. Rather than offer the logical option of online co-op, IO instead decided they were going to limit it to split-screen only. Worst of all, because the game was built on the Games For Windows - LIVE! platform the only way to play that split-screen mode was to plug in an Xbox 360 controller.

Fortunately this time around common sense has prevailed, and Dog Days will have options for both online and splitscreen co-op throughout the campaign. In addition, the Fragile Alliance mode returns and while IO aren't spilling any specifics at the moment, they promise new twists on the formula and several new modes as well.

At the point when that car is hit by another vehicle, there's a moment of utter confusion as the occupants and camera are thrown around.

Once you're in control, the generally subtle effects of compression blocking and overexposure actually distract from the engine's deficiencies, most notably the low-detail character models. In neat touches, every time you get hit, the video

feed corrupts and blood splatters on the lens and when an explosion occurs, entire portions of the screen will freeze and distort, gradually returning to normal as the camera recovers from the shock.

LIFE ON A LENS

As for whether *Dog Days* looks good or not is a tough call, because the aesthetic is constantly evolving. Overall we're in favour but while sometimes the combination of effects is perfectly pitched, other times it dips into the realms of the distinctly average.

Set the gimmicks aside, though, and Dog Days appears to be shaping up as

a solid shooter. Some of the scripted moments during a sequence where you're picking your way through a car crash on a highway are suitably dramatic, and elements like destructible cover and the ability to improvise by lobbing explosive elements of the environment at your enemies keep things spicy.

Kane and Lynch,

out for a jog.

Best of all, even if you can't stand the churning camera work during the sprinting, there's a Steadicam option in the menu that will calm things down. It still remains to be seen how we feel once the novelty has worn off and we spend several hours with these initially pleasing mechanics, but the team at IO have taken what could have been an Identikit shooter sequel and attempted something with a radically different style to anything else out there right now. For that alone they should be applauded.

"Dog Days appears to be shaping up as a solid shooter"



MY GDC ADVENTURE

An exclusive report by Will Porter, aged 301/4

HIS IS IT. This is the dream factory. This is where the most creative minds of a generation gather to discuss middleware. This is the Game Developers Conference in rainy San Francisco.

I'm here as a roving reporter for PC ZONE; my quest: to journalise the mother-loving hell out of four days of lectures and presentations, all while holding a pint and shouting, "Oh my God, it's John Romero," and pointing at him. My side quest is to gingerly touch the thighs of a host of developers and ask for a job in which I'm paid a lot to point at explosions on monitors and say stuff like, "Make that explosion bigger, within

the obvious memory constraints!" (I will go on to harvest experience in this matter, though sadly a lot of ground will be lost by people being unsettled by being pointed at, and their names shouted. C'est la vie.)

STOP SPEAKING

You'll find the games I saw behind closed doors in posh hotel suites and in the convention's show floor scattered liberally beyond these pages, but the power(s) that be thought that a few examples of my personal shame would add some regional colour.

Primarily GDC allows you to sit in on the thoughts of gaming's greatest

minds in university style lectures, but it also provides an E3-style, tech-minded, show floor where programming tools can be hawked, and eager young students can queue up to meet Blizzard human resources representatives to indulge in some potential employer thigh touching.

GDC is also a place where utterly random inventions that have had been liberally drizzled in wasted venture capital are shown off a few months before their imminent demise. This year's example being a giant revolving hamster ball that allows a player encased in virtual reality gear to play a game with visuals straight from 1996.

Even greater joy comes when development's great and good hit the various hotel bars and parties at a day's close. Even if you point at your lanyard and shout "Stop! I'm a journalist!", you get told everything.

I'll never let on exactly what (I'm not one for feeding non-PR practiced game coders to the news site wolves) but I could tell you where franchises are headed, what big names are coming back at E3, and exactly what's been going on (and what's going to happen) at one of gaming's more revered and troubled mega-developers.

As a journalist you start to realise that the wall of corporate PR you



normally bang your head against is thinner than you might have thought, but also that it's probably necessary to shepherd drunk and blabbing developers past newshounds far crueller than I.

DRUNK TIMES

Of course I was a broken drunk during many of these conversations: a citruslipped tequila monster.

My finest hour came during an earnest one-way discussion with fairly notable UK developer, during which I was trying to talk about the numbers of famous faces you could spot amongst the throngs of GDC attendees.

I tried to explain the irrational fear I get when standing near the famous: that I'll do something completely out of character and have to face the consequences. The most recent one had been when standing in a lift next to Will Wright, I started to panic about the repercussions if I suddenly went mental and hit him in the face. I didn't manage to explain this successfully. There was a moment of silence at this juncture.

"Why do you want to hit Will Wright? Do you not like his games?" was the slow and worried response. "No! I don't want to hit him at all!

I just sometimes worry that I might!"

At this point the man I was babbling at turned 180° and walked to the other side of the room. For my part, I stood in shame until someone took pity and nestled a fresh drink between my thumb and forefinger.

into my hand by a passing leafleteer the previous evening, before spending the night in my pocket and counting down to the inevitable moment of my social and professional doom. The nice man laughed it off, while I cried a little inside.

my business card.

remain unmatched until the next

morning. It was then that, as a bleary-

advertising "SF's Naughtiest Hotties!"

to a leading MMO developer, instead of

The said paper had been pressed

eyed wreck, I accidentally gave a leaflet

So anyway, GDC is awesome, apart from when you make a total tit of yourself. Hooray for games! 💬

"I accidentally gave a leaflet advertising 'SF's Naughtiest Hotties' to a leading developer"



DOING IT FOR THE FAMILY...

MΔFIΔ I

Alec Meer dusts off his trilby to meet the family

DEVELOPER 2K Czech PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE 2kgames.com/mafia2 PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 218

FTER 10 MINUTES of being subjected to horrific images, I abandoned my Google-based research into whether the phrase "dick cheese" is authentic '50s slang. Better to give 2K Czech the benefit of the doubt than to spend more time looking at unwashed genitals. After all this is gangster fantasy, not gangster reality.

Broadly speaking, Mafia II is Grand Theft Auto IV with sharper suits, more mooks, rock 'n' roll, repeated use of the

term "Family" and, hopefully, much more thoughtful and moving storytelling. It's the saga of Vito Scaletta - a World War II veteran popping home to recover from a dicky leg, who ends up embroiled in 20-plus years of Mafioso skulduggery.

With his wisecracking, unpredictable top chum Joe by his side throughout, he runs the familiar gauntlet of wealth, power, corruption, violence and tragedy that characterises touchstone gangster flicks such as Goodfellas and The Godfather, but nonetheless tells very much its own tale.

Where Mafia II significantly differs from GTA4 is that, despite giving you New York in the '40s to the '60s to get up to no good in, it's a whole lot more interested in taking you from A to B to C to D and so on, with lavish cutscenes and supremely crafted dialogue and animation, rather than letting you do you own thing. The richly detailed vintage New York is there to provide a scenic, fleshed out backdrop to Vito's adventures and misadventures. You don't need to go and get squiffy on Tennessee whisky and ETA muck around with the **SUMMER** jukebox in a local bar,

or to pick up a fetching new trilby from a highclass milliner, but doing so is in keeping with what Vito would've done.

Likewise, an insane vehicular rampage over the broken bodies of 300 feckless civilians might suit the party vibe of GTA4, but it would be out of character for a '50s mobster. Sure, he

2010

You tell those crates who's boss, Vito.

kills anyone who disrespects him or his family, or who just gets in the way of a tidy profit, but one thing he wouldn't do is recklessly carry on in front of the feds. Please, feel free to butcher half a dozen people in plain sight in the name of

> chuckles, but don't expect an easy ride. Mafia II's police are there to be avoided or bribed off the scene, not murdered in droves.

Not that there's any shortage of killing here. The section I played through involved the brutal deaths of

a several dozen young men who looked like John Travolta in Grease. These cheeky greasers had torched Vito and Joe's cargo of stolen fags, so payback had to be taken. Accompanied by a selection of their Capo's best men, our anti-heroes grab a suitably vintage ride and head over to the metalworks where

these kids hang out. While many of them are armed, they hadn't realised they were tangling with the big boys.

What follows is a bona fide massacre - the greasers' weight of numbers means it's

Blonde men aren't allowed in the mafia

THE LOWDOWN

- 🗸 Free-roamable vintage New York-esque city
- Period music, clothes and cars
- Cinematic storytelling
- Oodles of building interiors

Far from pioneering

"Runs the familiar gauntlet that characterises touchstone gangster flicks"



GTO CHANDS-ON



≥ a satisfyingly taxing challenge for the player, but the screaming and begging of most of your fresh-faced targets means it's not something you'll feel good about. You're only following orders that there can't be any witnesses, so shoot 'em all in the back as they flee. Yes, *Mafia II* glamorises criminal life to some extent, but it also makes a big show of how nasty a business it is.

Not that Vito and Joe seem to clock this entirely. They're more excited about the custom-modified hot rods they stumble across at the mission's end. They're young, naive, selfish and their moral compasses are all over the place, but the game's careful to never leave you thinking they're pure evil. You're going to like them, and sympathise with them – and feel bad when things start to turn

sour for them. Crime doesn't pay, remember? The major events of their bloody dance through the '40s, '50s and '60s are under wraps, but, this being in many ways an interactive gangster movie about the rivalry between three families, twists and tragedy will be big parts of it.



While it might seem imprudent to dwell on the storyline rather than the game's mechanics, there's good reason for that. You're not going to find much in the way of novel gaming concepts in *Mafia II*. Its main interest is in atmospheric, highly-polished graphics, animation and writing, not in shaking things up. This means that playing the thing is an unavoidably familiar experience, not only if you've played any 3D *GTA* game in the past, but also third-person shooters.





A Gears of War-esque cover system and Halo-like heath regeneration mean Mafia II significantly more fleshed-out and tactical as a combat game, but there's nothing in the controls likely to confuse even a part-time gamer. Our jury's still out as to whether this is good or not-so-good. Innovation is always welcome from the mainstream, but there's much to be said for not having your gaming experience complicated and distracted by needlessly novel showoffing. Especially when the story is so hung around forward momentum; nothing would undermine a bittersweet gangster epic as much as repeatedly falling off a ledge because you can't remember what the 'shuffle to the left





HIDDEN &

DANGEROUS 2







whilst grabbing the wall with your tongue' button is.

Oddly, it's easy to forget this is a seguel. Mafia II is a self-contained tale and a self-contained world, but it is indeed the offspring of 2002's wellreceived Mafia: The City of Lost Heaven. The broad structure of free-roaming gangstering remains, albeit with the aforementioned refined combat, but Mafia II is a subtly different affair. It's more accessible, for one thing - you won't get hounded down by police for breaking the speed limit or running red lights. While such attention to legal detail could be incredibly annoying in Mafia, it's hard not

to miss such a

distinctive touch.

Going some way

to making up for this

is the more interactive

nature of the city. You can stride (or storm) into over 100 different buildings and cheerily mess about with windows, fans, radios and light switches, or unleash your inner nutter and enjoy the fantastic destructible scenery and its associated physics. For the most part the game is all seamlessly streamed, so you can run right into a shop or bar from the street and start laying mindless waste to the place instantly. The superb visuals aren't just superficial, in other words. Developers 2K Czech (formerly Illusion Softworks) have also hinted that the various indoor leisure pursuits, such as heavy boozing and clothes shopping, will all crop up in the story at some point, rather than being pointless

> visual frippery. That said, it's OK to admire this for entirely shallow reasons - the rendering of

extraordinary, while this mid-century New York realises its snowy winters and lush summers beautifully. This being a period city, urban creep hasn't eradicated mother nature, so you'll see plenty of greenery en route to making unrefusable offers. While it's scarcely cartoon-like, the vibrant environments, and especially the impractically large but splendidly shiny '50s autos, mean this isn't another one of those relentlessly grey-brown games which currently saturate the market with desaturated tripe. This world pops with life and colour.

Mafia II is a game that demands adjectives when being described: classy, lavish, glossy, epic, lush, detailed, believable stuff like that. As such, it's very much Mafia's sequel, but this time around it's likely to pick up a much larger audience. The amount of time, money and resources clearly poured into it rather suggests that's 2K's expectation too.

While there's something considerably old-fashioned about Mafia II, both as a free-roaming game and in its movieaping approach to storytelling, that's in keeping with its theme. Style, tradition

and unwavering values: this is the Mafia way. "Dick cheese," not so much. PEZ

"It's easy to forget this is a sequel. Mafia II is a self-contained tale and a self-contained world"

"Do you think anyone noticed we're in the exact same pose?



WHAT A LOVELY APERTURE...

David Brown knows some things about Portal 2 and he likes to share...

DEVELOPER Valve **PUBLISHER** Valve **WEBSITE** valvesoftware.com

IOR A GAME that was apparently shoved into The Orange Box because nobody knew how people would react to it, Portal did rather well for itself. Of course, Portal was much more than a piece of filler, and its sequel is looking to move things along substantially while still retaining the concepts and ideas that we all know and love.

Valve don't usually let us down with their seguels (or their games in general, to be honest) and Portal 2 doesn't look like its going to be an exception. Whether the reaction will be as positive this time around remains to be seen. After all, the novelty value has gone, so Portal 2 needs to stand up on its own, and for greater periods of time than the first one did. We're pretty sure there won't be anything to worry about. Here are a load of (well, eight) exciting things we know about the game so far.

In some ways, the setup is essentially the same: you'll be playing as Chell, the mute persecuted by GlaDOS in the first game. Your main task will be to navigate puzzle-strewn chambers using your Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device. In other words, the portal gun.

What's changed is that you're hundreds of years in the future and the Aperture Science labs have fallen into terrible disrepair, as no humans are around to maintain and look after the facility. If you've been paying attention to the tweaks Valve have made to the original game, you'll know that the ending changed, with Chell now being dragged off by a robotic entity.





Our erstwhile heroine, Chell, was cruelly placed in stasis for centuries and now a personality orb named Wheatley, concerned by the state of the facility, has woken her up in order to fix things. One thing leads to another and GlaDOS finds out you're around, starting you off on your new puzzle quest. The personality orbs, if you remember, fell off GLaDOS as you defeated her in the

first game and could be seen clustering around the cake right at the end of said saga.

THE LOWDOWN

New Portal, duh

Oco-op!

More bang for your buck

Interesting new concepts

Must meet huge expectations



Your portal gun works exactly how it used to, but the way the environment and physics is presented should change how you think about things. For a start, there are a host of new concepts to deal with when mentally constructing your escape plan from a room, such as vents that suck or blow air and can be combined with portals. Whack a portal underneath a vacuum and whatever's on the other side will be sucked in.



HE STORY SO FAR... **PORTALS**

How things

used to be.



NARBACULAR



PORTAL



PORTAL: STILL

PORTAL 2

It's not just blowing and sucking, as there's also a new fluid-based system involving paint. Different paints give different physical results when moved on or utilised. Orange paint gives you a speed boost that could prove useful to leap or traverse precipices, while blue paint is bouncy, like a trampoline. Combine these with the portal gun, you immediately start thinking about the puzzle possibilities, like shooting a portal into the middle of a load of paint in order to cascade the liquid onto a different



Did you miss this fella?

б

Another new addition is the Reflection Cube, a basic object that can be used to divert the path of lasers and such, for obvious puzzle-solving purposes. One thing we don't know is whether you'll grow as attached to your Reflection Cube as you did to the less shiny Companion Cube. Will there be a twisted love triangle between the player and the two inanimate boxes? No. probably not.

ETA AUTUMN 2010



Let us not forget about that most important of additions: co-op multiplayer. From what we know, it's sounding very intriguing indeed and genuine thought seems to have been put into making it more than just a tacked-on gimmick. It would have been so easy to just go "lulz, let's just put people in a deathmatch environment chucking toilets at each other" but Valve don't often go for the easy option. (Complaints about Left 4 Dead 2 to the regular address, please.)

In co-op you'll be playing as two robots, each with different abilities. On the PC, any

picture' design, so that you can see what your fellow player is up to at all times. Communication is going to be the key as these puzzles will be significantly more complex than the ones in the single-player campaign. To succeed, you and your ally will need to be working together closely, as otherwise it will be impossible to succeed.

session will take place using a 'picture in





INCOMING TRANSMISSION How the world found out about Portal 2

1. Strange radios begin to appear in existing copies of Portal. Manipulation of these devices brings a variety of results.

2. Morse code messages deciphered, images analysed and the world is no closer to working out what's going on. BBS phone number discovered. The game is afoot.

3. The plot thickens. Access of BBS provides number of ACSII images relating to Portal and Aperture Science. New lead has been found: the original Portal ending has changed!

4. New ending seems to indicate Chell apprehended by mysterious robot. New digital files and resources appear, all point to new Portal game. What could they mean?

5. Oh yeah, Portal 2's been announced, planned for a release during towards the end of 2010.





CRIN

Number-one super guy *Will Porter* is exposed to some potential Hong Kong Phooey...

LOPER United Front Games PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE truecrime.com

EVER MAKE A gangster cross. Someone called Dog Eyes has tried to shoot a big gangster's mother, and he's not entirely wrapped up in the situation. "Dog Eyes tried to shoot my fucking mum!" exclaims Winston. "What the fuck? Get the fucking guns!" It really is a to-do.

There's nothing for it, but to drive at high-speed to a heroin processing plant and proceed to kill its workforce -

THE LOWDOWN

- Intriguing Hong Kong setting Impressive hand-to-hand combat
- Awesome Hong Kong action movie influences
- Another GTA wanna-be
- Needless swears. Tsk

mostly by hand, but others with guns and meat cleavers. Ah, free-roaming crim-sim... how we've missed you in the time you've hardly been away.

"There's obviously one that does incredibly well in the genre," explains True Crime producer Stephen Van der Mescht while ignoring the GTA-shaped elephant in the room. "So what our whole development philosophy has been based around is finding ideas where we think we can innovate, and create a space for ourselves that way.

CHOP-SOCKISM

"For us that really started from a gameplay mechanic standpoint: the free-running system, deep martial arts, the melee system and melee weapons, a shooting system with lock, free-aim and cover...'

He's not wrong either, there's little doubt that this reboot of the True Crime series (only the name survives from the old buggy free-roamers) has significantly better on-foot action than Grand Theft Auto IV. Undercover cop Wei Shen. drawn deeper and deeper into a web of Triad dealings, has an array of impressive leaps and bounds. Vault over a table, and you'll be able to connect your foot with a nearby hoodlum's jaw - while the range of kung fu tussles and punches that are available go above and beyond conventional police training.



Eat elbow

sucker.



As, indeed, are the abilities to use contextually relevant parts of the scenery to kill people: men's heads are slammed repeatedly in fridge doors and their bodies fried on exposed wiring. It's violent, adolescent and carried out to the tune of the most heinous of swearing-words - but undoubtedly slicker than GTA4's terrible combat.

The location is an interesting prospect too. Hong Kong has been chosen because of the impact of recent Triad actioners emanating

from the vibrant waterside city movies like Infernal Affairs and Triad Election. Indeed, it's Martin Scorsese's remake of Infernal Affairs - The Departed - that's been the greatest influence on True Crime's plot that sees the undercover Wei Shen move up the ranks of organised crime while in constant

contact with his police handlers and forever under threat of being found out. It's fair to say that Leonardo Di Caprio didn't have to kill so many people in so

Organised Crime and Triad bureau who gave us a lot of insight into how they operate."

NEW HONG KONG

On top of this thousands of reference photos have been taken of the various different Hong Kong locations being used and rejigged (this isn't a slavish recreation, as in former True Crimes) from the fishing villages and waterfront of Aberdeen to the towering financial heartland of Central Hong Kong recently seen in The Dark Knight.

On paper, this all sounds rather fun. How can a game in which you can leap from a motorbike to the top of a moving truck, before grimly gripping to it while the swerving lorry attempts to throw you off, not be an engaging prospect? Well either I just got a lot older and bought a copy of the Daily Mail, or True Crime is trying that little bit too hard to impress the teen market with its (un) unique blend of casual violence, ladies of the night and total barrage of fuckwords and rudeness.

WHEN BAD IS GOOD

snitch Wei Shen will be discouraged from shooting the boys in blue as his 'Face' respecto-bar will decrease. He'll also be able to do a little secretive police-work while deep undercover though, with 10 different multi-part cases for him to follow up being threaded through the game's four main gameplay areas

Each will start off small-scale - perhaps with planting a bug in a girl's apartment or staking out the pad of politician - but will culminate in working through a major crim's henchmen and finally busting the case wide open with the main man himself.

Osteopathy is popular with hoodlums.



"Hong Kong has been chosen because of recent Triad actioners"

many exciting ways, but the drive for authenticity in True Crime is a real one.

"Our writer has been across numerous times to meet with a host of interesting characters to gain more insight into the world that we're developing - not least of all some ex-Triad people," explains Van der Mescht. "That's been really interesting, getting some perspective on how they work and what that's all about. From the law enforcement side we've also actually met with the ex-head of the

Talk to the developers and the game does sound like an intelligent thriller with an original setting, watch their demonstration and it's a Westernlooking Chinese chap running around a burning heroin plant waving a meat cleaver. The hope then is that the final product will be settled around the place that these two visions overlap. After all, Dog Eyes totally shot at Winston's mum! Who wouldn't have an eff and a jeff about that, before massacring hundreds of crims? PEZ





BEFORE, AND DURING, THE DARK TIMES

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Will Porter infiltrates LucasArts' secret facility

DEVELOPER BioWare **PUBLISHER** LucasArts/EA **WEBSITE** swtor.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** Issue 216

TRANGE TO SAY it, but when you first start playing The Old Republic you forget it's going to be built like an MMO. Missions, such as the one I played at LucasArts HQ over the course of this year's GDC, are doled out in such dramatic and wordy ways that you're temporarily blinded to the fact that the bomb-pursuit you're on is

essentially a World of Warcraft quest in space boots.

Secure a ZR-57 bomb that's deep within a Separatist fortress on the planet of Ord Mantell, having taken down a force field at another point somewhere within said fortress? Well, that's a little bit of a "fight your way into a zombie castle and bring back some fairy dust"

Our money

retrieval quest isn't it? As a side-mission there's also the option to obey the will of a snarky journalist called Lamalla Rann who has a colleague that's gone walkabout on a nearby island, who wants him and his scattered recordings found for a handful of credits. This too is straight from the school of "Brother Tooms was out collecting magical herbs on the Island of Death, where there happen to be werewolves, I hope he's not dead" quest design.

ETA **Spring**

2011

This isn't meant as criticism, as we're certain the The Old Republic will sit comfortably within the realms of the badass, but with the expectations that come with the Knights of the Old Republic badge there are just things that

THE LOWDOWN

- MMO Star Wars!
- More words than the bible!
- 🗸 Probably has Wookiees in
- Occasional NPCs have bad hair
- Still to be seen how it works

2009

2009





need underlining. You can have all the voiced NPCs in the world, they can be as pleasant, funny or sarcastic as a writer can make them, but the next group of humans you come across are still going to be a bunch of ultra-dim cannon fodder mobs who stand next to a log until you cross the boundaries of their magic circle of aggro.

Eat mystical Force Death™ droids

PHANTOM MMO

Fashions don't

the millennia.

change through

If anything, the wordiness and high falutin' tendencies of The Old Republic make this difference between quest-giver and XP-harvest mob ever more stark even if human mobs do have basic AI routines that make them hunt out cover.

Again though, this isn't necessarily a problem – just another thing that needs to be highlighted in an attempt to manage the vast amounts of expectation revving up behind a game that's being set up as the



JAKE NERI PRODUCER, LUCASARTS

LUCASARTS ANSWERS

Jake Neri, one of the producers on The Old Republic, faces down a PCZ interrogation droid.

When the floodgates open on The Old Republic, is there a worry that people will go direct to playing Jedi classes rather than the Republic Trooper that you're showing today?

I originally thought perhaps. But as time has gone on every class we reveal has generated support from a group of people. It seems to speak to them. With each class, whether it's a Jedi, Bounty Hunter or Trooper, we've tried to deliver on what people love about them from the movies.

If it's a Bounty Hunter for example, people want a jetpack and they want flamethrowers - cool gadgets. So we try to make sure that that's there. We've got a compelling storyline, yes, but you need to feel like Boba Fett in the movies. So if we do that - I think that people will be drawn to those classes and not just the Jedi.

is that each class has its own

then they might try a Trooper... as they're trying them they might find a playstyle that they like.

Just how customisable will characters be?

Right out of the gate there are a lot of different visual customisations, and there'll be the option to be different species too. Then over the course of your gameplay you'll have lots of options - items that you'll pick up, lots of styles of clothing, multiple talent trees to go down and differentiate your combat style, the different companion characters.

Customisation, to us, isn't just a visual thing - it's really about your playstyle. How do you want to play? Do you want to solo? Do you want to play in large groups? What's your role in those groups? These are all things we fit into the customisation bucket.

Will there be mounts for everyone to run around planets on?

There are certain things that are standard to MMOs that make a lot of sense, things like mounts. No details on that right now. We may have mounts, I'm not sure.

But if you went to Hoth you'd have a tauntaun?

Yeah, you may...

How about a rideable Rancor?

That would be pretty sweet. A gigantic Rancor pet that could just rip everybody to shreds. That would be pretty awesome.



GOC HANDS-ON







"The game is still in its early days, so things will change"

second coming.

Yes, it's well on its way to being an excellent game - but in the hubbub it's easy to forget that it'll still be an MMO with most of the usual contrivances of the massively multiplayer role-playing genre. You need to also be aware that the game is still in its early days, so things will change and develop over time.

In fact, one of the few things that stands no chance of being tweaked before release, and therefore something we can most certainly complain about right now, is the fact that some of the NPCs have cheesy American grins and awful hair. Personally, I like my Star Wars characters looking as scruffy as a nerf herder.

In any case, as a fledgling Republic Trooper – and an inductee of Havoc Squad, "the finest military special

operations group in the galaxy™" no less - I had to carve my way through a cavalcade of the respawning separatist bastards.

TROOPER JANE

Unlike Force-powered characters who operate from a pool of mana/ force, my lady Trooper worked on an action point basis - the more basic blaster rifle attacks I used. the more points gained that could be spent on her more powerful special abilities.

These included slamming a rifle butt in the face of my foes, leaving them out for the count on the ground for a while, a more concentrated stream of rifle power and two sorts of grenades - a light one



INTERGALACTIC PLANETS VARY

The low-down on some of the alien civilisations that will reverberate to the distant hum of sabre

Starting planet for both the Smuggler and Republic Trooper classes, Ord Mantell is in the grip of a civil war (So far, so very Star Wars). Here the Republic are on the tail of separatists who aren't averse to exploderising civilians, and to make matters worse the local planetary government is a front for the various smuggling, bounty hunting and space pirating organisations that call Ord Mantel home. In short: it's another one of those hives of scum and villainy that George likes so much.



The place were the tenets of the Force were first tapped into, thousands of years before science proved that it was all due to midichlorians rather than a hokey old religion. Nevertheless this is also where the first schism in the Jedi occurred, and while the Forceusers abandoned the planet an evil. taint was left behind (yes, that trope again). Now, rebuilding their temple on holy ground after the Imperial attack on Coruscant, it's a problem that this roaming band of super-powered life-monks will have to face up to.



Korriban is a desolate, red and dusty planet: conveniently the right setting for a noxious, evil civilisation such as that of the Sith. Originally home to the true Sith race, before it was beaten in various wars, it's become something of a graveyard for evil-doers for a long while now. When the Sith Empire returned to confront the Republic Korriban was one of the first planets it took back. The Sith Academy is now well established, and many students have already received their BTECs in Force Chokery.



Thought the sand planet was all about moisture farming and sand people? Wrong, There's actually an ancient Czerka secret weapons complex deep beneath the dunes, and the Imperials and Republicans are squaring off in two parallel dusty towns just above it This smells like a PvP session to us, but it's also an interesting twist on what must be the most lore-packed desert in entertainment history. It also has two suns doncha know? And its more disreputable citizens are based on some appalling Jewish stereotypes.





A place of shiny mega-buildings and the home of the goodie-goodie twoshoes Republic, is also a planet that's been severely damaged by Imperial attacks. Not only has the Jedi Temple been ransacked (check out the awesome cinematic of it happening on YouTube if you don't believe it), but huge lumps of the planet's mega-city need to have a visit from the townplanners. First though, they'll need a visit from goodly MMO players to wipe out the criminal gangs that have sprung up in the ruins.



In a few thousand years, these guys are gone. Though it isn't all crown jewels and pots brimming with Earl Grey for these days either. With a nation scarred and battle-hardened by earlier Imperial attacks, more recently the assassination of the prince regent has left the planet in the grip of yet another *Star Wars*-special civil war. The Republic-backed House of Organa are facing off against upstart toffs backed by the Empire, and history will no doubt get a victor before everyone gets blown up anyway.

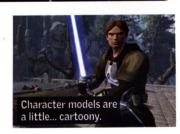
with an approach to more convivial damage, and an ace heavy one that attaches to the midriff and panics those it attaches to.

This is a fun and engaging set-up, and one that more than shows off the fastpaced and up-front combat The Old Republic is aiming for - having you set against groups of bad guys, and unlikely

to be taken down in one-on-one situations. The way that combat is regular enough to conserve action points between separate bouts to use on your next group of foes gives a great feeling of flow and momentum to your passage through the instance.

What you realise as you play, however, is the sheer amount of info that hasn't been unveiled about the game - essentially all the constituent parts that will make it an MMO. Grouping, PvP, the ways in which your BioWare-tagged companions will be seen by other players, mounts, hubs, economies, crafting, travel between systems... even the area described above had to be played through in an abundantly solo fashion. Perhaps behind the scenes BioWare are still playing around with different options, or

perhaps talk of the more social aspects of the game don't fit within the set-instone LucasArts PR plan. More likely it's a mixture of the two.



In any case, The Old Republic remains the greatest gaming hope around - how can a title with more content than every BioWare game put together not cause unquenchable salivation among our happy crowd of PC gamers? Before long though, we really do need to start seeing how the game will operate with some of the said happy crowd running amok inside it and armed with lightsabers.







THE SECRET'S OUT...

THE SECRET WORLD

Will Porter discovers that everything he suspected is true. And involves monsters

DEVELOPER Funcom **PUBLISHER** Funcom **WEBSITE** darkdaysarecoming.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** Issue 214

IGHT, SCIENCE TIME.
Imagine the characters of Left
4 Dead within an MMO: normal,
heavily-armed people in extraordinary
circumstances, surrounded by NPCs
with intelligently scripted and wellacted voices and whose pretty ladies
don't have up-front areas that come
with a jiggle function.

Your next step is to remove the sprint abilities of the zombies and tie them into the Norse myth of undead mariners that was covered in Sylvester McCoy-era

THE LOWDOWN

- MMO set in the real world
- Bloody huge monsters
- Brilliantly scripted NPCs
- Graphics do slimy/icky well
- Still early days

Doctor Who adventure The Curse of Fenric. Next: mix in two tablespoonfuls of (360-exclusive) Alan Wake, alongside a pinch of John Carpenter's The Fog. What you've just laboriously produced in your mind's eye is Kingsmouth: one of the early locations in The Secret World – a game that's fast becoming one of the more fascinating prospects around in modern MMOs.

REAL UNLIFE

The deal is that you play a real person, not some mana-slugging member of the faerie-folk, who's been inducted into one of the world's secret societies (Illuminati, Knights Templars or Dragon). Then from a base in New York, London or Seoul (and with growing specialisations in skills like gunplay, martial arts and magical voodoo leanings) you'll set out to uncover the truth behind the various myths inflicting

damage on pretty much every continent available. Invariably, said myths will involve monsters of some description.

The American coastal town of Kingsmouth (which, incidentally, has its own website: kingsmouth.com) is beset by the living dead. And although the residents refuse to use the z-word, it's a phrase that Funcom aren't afraid of when showing off their frankly remarkable menagerie of beasts. Every night, accompanied by a spooky fog



Part-time monster hunter. Full-time line dancer.















emanating from something Nordic and evil lurking out to sea, the townspeople come under attack. Said locals are quest givers, and each of them is written and acted impeccably – from the passionate government agent constrained by her by-the-book superior (think Scully if she'd ever listened to Mulder) all the way through to old ladies, worried petrol pump attendants and a grizzled and weary hunter obsessed with putting bullets in zombie heads.

In fact, with the evidence at hand it's fair to say The Secret



"Eat electro-fizz you evil clawed punk!" (That's what I'd say anyway.)





Age of Conan, but watching four people take on Kingsmouth's ghoulies, combining their various talents as a group, suggests a fighting style that avoids the rinse-and-repeat numbertapping that's prevalent in MMOs.

There are no classes or levels here either, you're free to build your character whichever way you want from the off whether you want to wave a flaming katana in the face of evil or pop heads from a distance with an automatic rifle.

"There's much to be unveiled and explained in The Secret World"

How big a departure this will truly be from MMO conventions so long-standing they have pretty much been hewn into solid rock is, again, yet to be seen - but Funcom's desire to open up massively multiplayer to those who would usually fear its intricacies and elf-centric nature is obvious.

There's much to be unveiled and explained in The Secret World: the way PvP will work as cabals (Secret-speak for guilds) take each other on beneath the Earth's surface in a fight for a resource called Anima, for example, as

well as promised in-game shops and nightclubs back in your urban origin area that pretty much make a /dance command a certainty.

Beyond that? Well the hope is that new and exciting troublespots, hubs and instances from around the world will be added over time. Rumour has it we're talking Atlantis, secret Arctic vaults, the Masons being behind it all... pretty much everything you've ever suspected, but The Man refuses to comment on. As conspiracies go, we hope this one goes all the way up to the top.



WHOLE NEW WORLD...

NEED FOR SPEED: WORLD

EA throws their keys into the mix and looks at Will Porter coquettishly

DEVELOPER EA PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE needforspeed.com/web/world

ENCEFORTH TO BE known as NSFW for the entirety of its existence, Need For Speed: World is another attempt by the EA juggernaut to attempt to make money out of the pirate-riddled PC market. It's a free-to-play racing MMO, a bolted together spaghetti junction of former iterations of Need for Speed, designed to suck coins from the sweaty hands of its players through microtransactions and paid-for content packs.

As you enter its world, which will initially comprise of the towns of Rockport and Silverton extracted from NFS: Carbon and Most Wanted, you're presented with the ghost cars of other

THE LOWDOWN

It's Need For Speed

It's free

It's an MMO

Silly acronym

players running amok. Someone with too many exclamation marks in his name will hurtle by with a police car in hot pursuit, while another car might choose to excitedly drive in circles around you, either eager to make a new friend or to insult you through the chat window below.

throw cars surrounding you into the air, and instructs passing NPC cars on a morning commute to bundle in on the car in front

Access to the skill-trees that ladle these delights into your menu bars is granted through levelling, since during each race you'll earn XP (although NFS

"Those who want power-ups on tap can purchase Boost, another currency"

To access the different races just requires a brief click on the map. This will line you up with fellow competitors in an instanced race away from the hubbub, where ethereal forms are replaced by solid livery. It's here that the true MMO trappings of *NSFW* become more evident, with four chosen powerups lurking in your numerical keys much as troll-bashes and buffs do in World of Warcraft. Nos, for example, will give a familiar burst of speed, while more amusing abilities such as Emergency Evade and Traffic Magnet respectively

cool kids call it 'Rep') as well as in-game cash to spend on refilling your powerups. And those who want power-ups on tap can purchase Boost, another in-game currency, with their own realworld cash and make sure that their stocks never dwindle.

This is a fascinating project, and one scaled to run on the lowliest of laptops, but whether the somewhat utilitarian and chunky graphics of NFSW will truly hook the masses is yet to be seen. As indeed, is whether or not it is safe for work.



came to the 3DO



HOT PURSUIT





ROAD CHALLENGE

1999

A STATE OF INDIE-PENDENCE

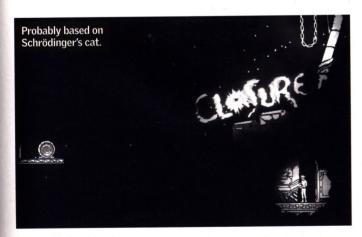
The greatest prospects showcased in GDC's side-show, the Independent Games Festival...



VESSEL

DEVELOPER Strange Loop Games **WEBSITE** strangeloopgames.com

THIS IS A platform game in which you can run around with a hose, festooning levels with liquids that behave with realistic physics. The plot sees an inventor, Arkwright, who's created water-based life forms known as Fluros, which have got out of control and need a cull. It's down to you and your squirt-gun to solve puzzles that revolve around drenching, filling things up, or scything Fluros into droplets. Things start off easy, but once you're blasting hot lava liquid and firing gobbets of green goo the difficulty ratchets up. A game to get moist over.



CLOSURE

DEVELOPER Closure Team **WEBSITE** closuregame.com

THE DEAL WITH Closure is that anything in the dark doesn't exist. You may know that there's a platform, but if it's not bathed in a light source then your hero will fall through it into the inky depths if he steps forward. As such, Closure is a puzzle game in which you must transport glowing orbs around shadowy levels, and direct beams of light from torches you come across so that your path is lit. A truly illuminating game.



SHANK

DEVELOPER Klei Entertainment **WEBSITE** shankgame.com

AN ASTOUNDINGLY BEAUTIFUL side-scrolling brawler, Shank takes two handfuls of the Golden Age of comics and mixes it in with some Tarantino stylings to create the best environment in which to chainsaw a villain through the ribs yet seen. Each of Shank's violent moves merge beautifully into the next in both control and animation. Whether it's during combat with a lumbering boss in an abattoir or fighting as a silhouette on a rope bridge in front of a setting sun it's clear exactly why Shank's been swept up by the bigwigs at EA.



ENVIROBEAR 2010

DEVELOPER Justin Smith **WEBSITE** enviro-bear.com

WHO IS DRIVING? Bear is driving! How can this be? We have no idea. Essentially, as the titular bear, you must use your mouse to stab at the pedals, gear stick and steering wheel of a car as you trundle around a National Park attempting to harvest enough food to let you hibernate. Imagine Yogi Bear indulging in a bit of TWOCing. Your car will, however, soon be full of angry badgers. It's just that sort of game. Hooray for indies!

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PCZONE - Last one to subscribe is a grubby pair of cheap iPod earphones

G TO C FIRSTLOOK

WILL PORTER HAS A FAMILY REUNION THAT FEATURES MORE BLOOK

DEVELOPER Day 1 Studios **PUBLISHER** Warner Bros **WEBSITE** whatisfe



THE LOWDOWN

- Alma's back. And pregnant
- Co-op brings Fettel back
- Generative Scare System
- Solid FEAR action
- Co-op yet to convince
- Not by Monolith

ET'S GET IT over with: it was shit back when it began with Driv3r. When Thi4f was announced we all shook our heads ruefully.

Now, we're onto F.3.A.R. and the marketing brigade is barrelling so deep into the their fantasy of the txtgeneration's psyche that we're almost at the stage where we can officially label human existence as a culturally and emotionally barren wasteland.

Or we would, if F.3.A.R. wasn't actually shaping up to be an undeniably refreshing instalment in the franchise

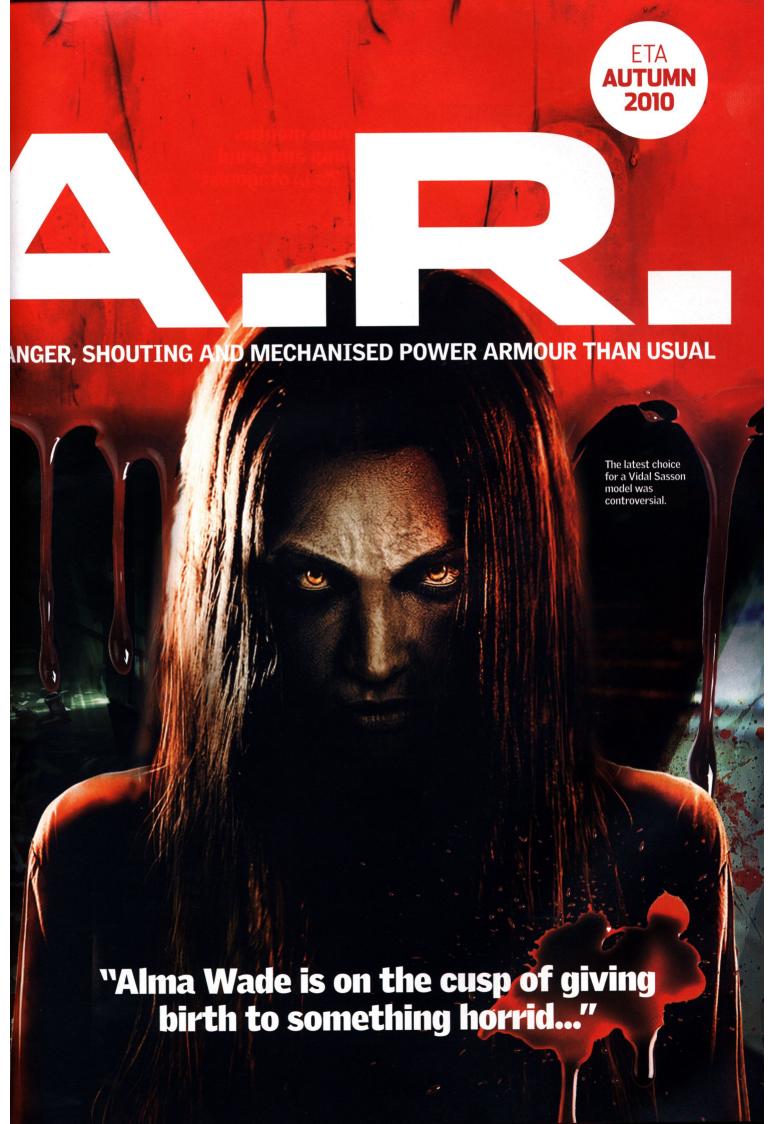
that specialises in chasing spectral six year-olds.

And that is the last time you'll see PC ZONE calling this game F.3.A.R. It's bloody ridiculous, so we're going with the sensible and non-trendy FEAR 3. And if Warner Bros complain, tough.

There is, however, something else that needs to be addressed before we descend into the slow-motion arterial spray and pyrotechnics of this, the third instalment in Monolith's franchise. Namely, that this isn't Monolith's franchise. Not anymore. It may have some of the same talent, FEAR 2's

design director is on board as a creative lead, but the coding is taking place at Day 1 Studios - porters of the original FEAR to consoles and the developers behind so-so console title Fracture.

If you're nervously pulling at your collar at this precise moment you could be forgiven, but in person and on-screen everything appears to be FEAR business as usual. As something of a Monolith fanboy I must admit to pulling a face when I heard the news, but if there's a dip in quality in this instalment then it's not one that's currently visible in the gameplay.



G TIRSTLOOK "FEAR 3 takes place nine months after the enforced bump and grind experienced by *FEAR 2*'s protagonist" Shoot the cranberry juice cartons carried by Armacham troops for extra bonuses. FEAR 2's healthpacks appear to have been scrubbed from the template. My fingers remain crossed, but it down and attempt to destroy evidence invisible friend, though not a hasn't stopped me smiling. of their involvement in the explosion, very nice one. In co-op he's and a FEAR team are scrabbling around present as a full-on combat FEAR 3 takes place nine months in an attempt to finally destroy Alma. partner with a full array of after the enforced bump and grind spectral abilities designed to experienced by FEAR 2's protagonist, But it's a returning duo that are being forced back into the player-controlled complement Point Man's and as such the terrifying psychic customary bullet-time leanings limelight. This gruesome twosome are monster that is Alma Wade is on the

cusp of giving birth to something horrid. Rift events and psychic blow-outs containing paranormal beasts are exploding out over the deserted town of Fairport in time with her contractions, while the nearby crater that was once the town of Auburn smoulders.

The seemingly limitless military forces of Armacham (armacham.com funnily enough) continue to hunker

the co-op pairing of Alma's existing offspring: the original game's lead character Point Man, and the ghostly

FEAR 3 is, you see, essentially Videogame. In single-player Fettel (killed by a bullet to the head in FEAR and reborn in the recent Project Origin DLC) comes along for the ride as an

and shooty demeanour. Divergent co-op is the name of the game: a co-op experience friendly-like, or alternatively bait each other like complete bastards.

"Basically you're playing the game, and you're playing it

He ain't corporeal, he's your brother.

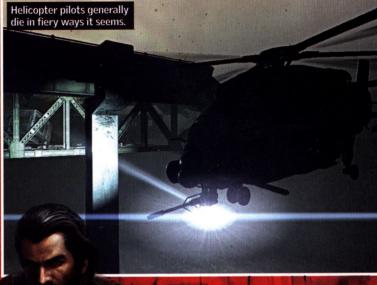
MECH IT SO

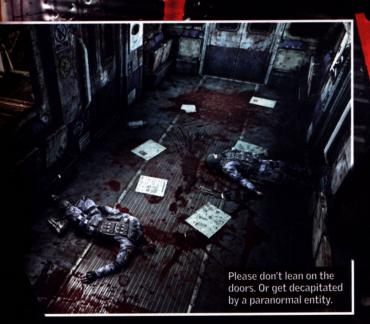
GOT THE FEAR

2006

ASTY BREAK







co-operatively, but you're playing it with someone you don't trust," explains executive producer Dan Hay. "We all know what Fettel is, and have an understanding of how he might play in a co-operative experience and we wanted to evolve on that. So there'll be opportunities where you'll be able to work in concert through the game, but Fettel or Point Man may choose to go out and do their own thing, or not give certain pieces of information.

How competitive play within co-op is going to work, or indeed whether it will work, is unclear - but the ways in which each character works alongside the other is undeniably classy.

Because Fettel is dead and Point Man (here seemingly played by Eric Cantona) still has blood pumping they can each see different things - there'll be visions, messages and scares that one character can see that the other will remain blissfully unaware of, unless informed otherwise.

WE ARE FAMILY

Fettel can also see barriers that he can break through in the game world that Point Man will then happily waltz past in single-player, thus providing access (should he choose to do so) to weapon stashes or entirely different passages through the next bit of the level.

As for Fettel's powers - for the most part he dashes around the battlefield with an outstretched hand delivering psychic attacks, but he can also help Point Man by either stunning Alma's creations or raising them off the ground so his brother can fill them with bullets.

Gunplay is also well within his remit though, since he can nip into the bodies of Armacham soldiers (presumably through his former psychic links to them) and use their bodies as a walking, trigger-pulling meat-shield.

So these two little boys have their array of little toys (Day 1 refuse to speculate on wooden drums) and it's genuinely rather exhilarating to see

MASTERS FEAR: now with added horror maestros

Wanting to stamp an extra stamp of authentication on the blood-splats. jumps and more ghoulish moments of FFAR 3. Warner Brothers have used their cinematic muscle to get two horror

specialists in on the case. The first is Steve Niles, the writer of vampire movie and comic series 30 Days of Night, who has been called in to co-write the storyline.

The second is... wait for it... John Carpenter - the man behind The Thing, The Fog, Halloween and 1962 classic Revenge of the Colossal Beasts.

"John Carpenter just has this vision we wanted to tap into," explains creative director Frank Rooke, when explaining the way that Carpenter was brought in for a focussed examination of the ways in which FEAR 3's cutscenes (themselves a departure from the previous FEAR's enforced first-person narrative) could shock and awe. "It was a close relationship, and a learning experience for both of us. We came out with it with a really good story, really good narrative."

Start praying for a disembodied head that turns itself into a crab thing and tries to eat Kurt Russell right now...

them in action. The gameplay I bore witness to in a behind closed doors session at the recent GDC took place on a broken transport bridge, into which Point Man and Fettel crash-land a rocket pod, having escaped from a unnamed battle elsewhere in Fairport.

Originally flying alongside many other pods, looking somewhat like Star Trek: TNG shuttles, an explosion knocks sky - and a cutscene unfolds in which the corporeal (and

Hopefully the FEAR AI will survive. "F.E.A.R. 3 runs on a policy known as a Generative Scare System"

always silent) Point Man struggles with the G-force and the ethereal Fettel perches on the dashboard unaffected by the plunge - commenting on how it's just like old times, and berating his

brother for fratricides of times past. In the distance, meanwhile, blood-red skies swirl around an oval of light above a set of skyscrapers - the dilation of which must surely represent the

imminence of

the birth of the previously mentioned 'something horrid'.

The bridge the brothers will soon be fighting through and over is of the double-decker variety - on the lowerlevel corpse-strewn underground trains lie piled up, while top-side Armacham troops have secured a motorway where broken concrete and burnt-out cars are the primary scenery.

At first it's a slow-paced trek along empty train carriages, but soon suspiciously chewed corpses appear, and it's not long before FEAR 3's first entry in Alma's mind menagerie make their appearance.

Bursting through a buckled metro door with flames issuing from their primary orifices, these scuttling chaps are

Scavengers: an ape-like variant on the dogs that Sigourney Weaver and Rick Moranis turn into in Ghostbusters. They're pock-marked with fiery scars and are

some heftily nimble foes: hanging from door-frames,

leaping spread-eagled at your screen and crawling on and around most of the surfaces around you.

RANDOM FEAR

When they appear and which doors they barrel from, you'll never be able to tell. FEAR 3 runs on a policy known as a Generative Scare System - meaning that the timing and placement of enemy appearances, and often the number of them, will change from play through to play through. Whether this will prove as organic a system as Left 4 Dead's Director is unlikely - but it will mean that upon quickload or checkpoint rebirth former leaps from the darkness become randomised and can happily become scary once more. Day 1 won't comment on just how far the system will go, but it seems likely that it'll be expanded into environmental hazards, individual appearances to either player and to the various in-mission cameos made by an angry pregnant woman.

Then it's up to the top level of the double-decker bridge, thanks to a scripted event in which a Scavenger leaps on board a passing Armacham helicopter, meaning that it veers down

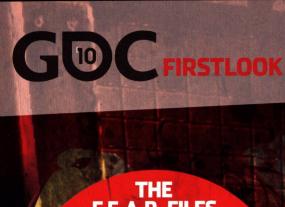
into the exposed corridor you're moving through and has its blades whir and chomp through the air directly in front of you. Up top various human villains are awaiting your presence - and it's here that both Fettel and Point Man can show off their newfound abilities in hiding from bullets.

Essentially the Gears of War cover system has been funnelled into the firstperson of FEAR, meaning that at a tap of a key you can slide into cover, and at another you can leap over it. If you're being rushed from behind, meanwhile, you can hold the backwards key while you're pirouetting over said street furniture and find yourself facing your foes after an entire 180° about-turn. It's interesting, but it also seems faintly unnecessary when taking into account that it's a game we'll be playing on mouse and keyboard and are fairly used to taking cover without stabilisers. Hopefully the gameplay won't rely on using it.

FEAR 2's action was fairly frenetic, but in terms of sheer on-screen mayhem FEAR 3 has it trumped - above all in co-op where double the players may not scientifically

He will neither sit, nor stay.





Even cartoony Alma isn't a hottie.

F.E.A.R. FILES

Once upon a time there were two FEAR sequels on the boil - a product of a split between Monolith and Warner Brothers, and the official brand-holders Vivendi. One, Monolith's Project Origin, became the official sequel after the franchise name was successfully bought from the Activision-Blizzard-Vivendi publishing monster after their merger and consequent brand-pruning regime. No-one knows what happened to the other FEAR 2. Or do they? At the time of the mega-merger word leaked out that the Vivend sequel would feature generative scares, and events such as walls that could eat your allies at random points during levels, which sounds similar to FEAR 3's own Generative Scare system. What's more, back in the day Day 1 would have been the go-to guys for such a game after their console port of the original. Does the shoe fit? Well, it isn't confirmed - just a hunch. Interesting if true though

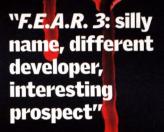
> "The way that the game's run-time follows the build up to the birth of Alma's new and nightmarish offspring is a superb touch"













Scavengers do great impressions of Garfield.



create double the fun, but it certainly multiplies death, blood, explosions, sparks and FEAR visual tomfoolery by a factor of two.

Throw into the mix a new brand of Armacham baddie - one with phasing and portal technology who can not only warp around the place in a shiny laser beam, but also magic up new troops through the power of teleportation and you've got quite the light show.

Fettel, permanently shrouded in a slight red mist, can possess any of them (perhaps even the more powerful enemies as the game goes on) using the action key. When the meat sack he's inhabiting dies, it simply falls away leaving Fettel standing there freshly exposed to bullets, but with something of a smirk on his face. It's all a bit like Rentaghost really, just with a man with

an entry wound on his forehead instead of a jester, witch and pantomime horse.

To gain access to FEAR 3's more stompy arsenal, however, Fettel needs a host - since mech combat is making a substantial return to the game, and these bots don't come with ethereal ghost controls.

"In previous FEAR games you're pretty much a god when you're in the mech," explains Frank Rooke, creative director. "You could blow up anything and there wasn't much fear of damage. We're injecting that into this game: you have to play defensively, you have to play strategically."

Whereas in FEAR 2 the mechs closed you off from the world, cocooning you in heavy armour and computer read-outs, those in FEAR 3 are designed for more elegant combat than the simple gut-drilling and constant rockets of times past. The mechs are slightly smaller for a start, slightly reminiscent of ED-209 in Robocop but probably better equipped when it comes to stairs, and come with a shield that you can activate when under heavier barrages of enemy fire.

ROAD RAGE

Their moment of glory atop the broken bridge comes in a dual-pronged assault down the motorway - with one brother taking one branch of the motorway, and the other taking the parallel route against what would once have been oncoming traffic. Helicopters are taken out, men in power-suits taking aim with rockets are disposed of, and very little tarmac goes without being either scorched or bullet-ridden.

The fact that Day 1 were responsible for the early MechAssault games that heralded the Xbox's arrival into online gaming does not go unnoticed here. Then, at the moment of victory over Armacham a fresh onslaught causes the bridge to tumble. It's all rather spectacular, apart from Fettel coming out with the gag, "If this is part of your plan, I'd say this is going quite swimmingly!" as Point Man sinks down into the dark waters, which does make you wonder if hired cutscene supervisor John Carpenter (see *Masters of FEAR*) is a secret fan of My Family.

FEAR 3 then: silly name, different developer, interesting prospect. The concept of competitive co-op isn't one that gels with the way FEAR plays, but seeing as so many of the co-op mechanics and point scoring systems that Day 1 hope will bring in an edge of friendly rivalry are yet to be disclosed, we'll withhold judgement. The action, however, looks more than decent - a far cry from the days of the rubbish non-Monolith FEAR expansions like Extraction Point (issue 175, 69%) and Perseus Mandate (issue 189, 29%) that your brain habitually flickers towards when considering such a concept.

Above all though, the way that the game's run-time follows the build up to the birth of Alma's new and nightmarish offspring is a superb touch. As for exactly what beast is clawing its way out of that accursed womb, who can say? Someone should inform social services in any case. [122]



SATURDAY 24 JULY 2010

SUNDAY 25 JULY 2010



RONNIE JAMES DIO

TONY IOMM GEEZER Butler VINNY APPICE

FOREIGNER JOE BONAMASSA GARY MOORE THE QUIREBOYS BACHMAN & TURNER



HAMMER STAGE



CLUTCH



PROG STAGE

TRANSATLANTIC

marillor



steve hackett Argen

MARTIN TURNER'S WISHBONE ASH (PERFORMING ARGUS)

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Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



(0-19%)

PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an internet connection? Then don't waste your time with this game: it won't work without one



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to get the original game first. We know but life's not fair.



ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.





76 METRO 2033

Throw Call of Duty and STALKER in a blender and this is what you get: Russian FPS excellence.

80 SILENT HUNTER 5

The deepest of sub sims returns. But can incredible realism actually make a game that's fun?

82 DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS - AWAKENINGS

Have BioWare set the gold standard for all DLC to come, with this expansion?

83 DAWN OF WAR II: **CHAOS RISING**

The add-on that adds Chaos to the Space Marine mix, and makes Dawn of War II playable.



84 STARGATE: RESISTANCE

The missing Stargate Worlds MMO means we're left with this shooter. Unfortunately.

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Imagine The Movies, with bobbleheads and without the fun, originality or movies.

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The **PCZONE** Machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C17 (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, head down to the internet and type the following into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT Alec Meer takes on the mightiest of slapheads

DEVELOPER EA LA **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** commandand

conquer.com ETA Out now PRICE £35

AT A GLANCE...

C&C with plenty of Kane but no base building or harvesting.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

Intel Core 2 Duo/AMD 64 X2, 1GB RAM (1.5GB Vista/7), 256MB Shader Model 3 graphics card, Constant internet connection

HOW IT STACKS

STARCRAFT II 86%

ANE SOUNDS LIKE he's got a bit of a cold. He doesn't sound authoritative, he doesn't sound frightening, he doesn't sound like a omnipotent being from beyond time. Hell, he doesn't even sound like a mad dictator with hair issues. He just sounds like an overworked guy with a blocked nose. This, then, is how 15 years of the Command & Conquer universe takes its final bow.

Lest that sound a bit cruel, C&C4's failure to reach the heights of its predecessors is not face-of-Kane Joe Kucan's fault. If anything, he's the only tolerable actor in this, who, in the few moments the script makes sense, tries to add a little subtlety to a character who's previously been a pantomime villain. His distractingly less-than imperious voice is just the final straw in a massive haystack of lousy production values and even lousier plotting.

This is the end of a long-running C&C storyline. EA promised us we'd find out who Kane is and what he really wants.

We don't. We get some more hints which simply repeat what's gone before, and a big dumb cliff-hanger which doesn't give any closure. The supporting cast, all newcomers to the story and actors you won't recognise, are either a) annoying, b) terrible, c) constantly crying, or d) annoying, terrible and constantly crying.

RET-CONNED

If you've been following C&C story, in all its campy, contradictory and clearly made up as it goes along glory, since the early '90s, then you may not have the

highest expectations of its storytelling ability. Even so, this so-called conclusion will leave you thumping your desk and readying angry letters containing the repeated use of the word 'disgusted' as it comes to its final, woeful cutscene.

Long-running sci-fi has a habit of ending unsatisfyingly, but unlike, say, Battlestar Galactica (which, in music and in sets, C&C4 borrows hilariously liberally from) and its silly religious finale, this doesn't even try to give answers. It's poppycock of the highest order. You heard me: poppycock!







"It's poppycock of the highest order. You heard me: poppycock!"

There is, of course, much more to this game than videos starring a bald guy with a small beard. C&C is the populist father of real-time strategy games, and the longest-running series in the genre. Presumably, this is just the same-old build a base and go bash another guy's base routine, right? Absolutely not. This isn't so much throwing the baby out with the bath water as it is drowning every other baby on the street in the process. Take away the cutscenes and there's no way you'd guess this is a *C&C* game. Base building and resource collection is gone,

replaced by a class-based system centred around re-spawning Crawlers.

These huge machines are both factory and major unit, varying in build options and ability depending on if you opt for Offence, Defence (Ss and have changed to Cs to protect innocent British minds) or Support class. No tiberium or power is necessary to spit out their pitifully small armies of soldiers, tanks, planes and robo-suits - simply time. A bafflingly small population cap means you'll very rarely field more than a dozen units, so 5v5 multiplayer









REVIEWS COMMAND & CONQUER 4:



matches are your only hope of seeing anything like the scale of olden C&Cs.

It's important to be clear here: this is not an inherently bad concept, and EA LA's intentions are worthy. You don't need to memorise build orders or make constant beelines for tiberium fields. You just need to build an army and throw it at various prescribed points on the map.

The strategy comes from ascertaining which units are best for any given fight pretty strict rock, paper, scissors stuff and which capture point to send them to. The simplicity of building, and the fact your Crawler can re-spawn, means pretty much anyone can manage to kill some



stuff, and in doing so earn some experience points.

GRIEF, WHY?

Ah, XP. And so we come to C&C4's second critical failure. Levelling up and unlocking new stuff is all the rage, says Gary Greyson, Man In The Grey Suit With The Grey Computer Full Of Grey Spreadsheets About Money. Thus, all games should do it. Even if they're not at all suited to it. This isn't like Dawn of War II's Diablo-compulsive loot system – it's about unlocking the units themselves. Want a Scorpion tank? Tough. Not until you've played as Nod for about five hours. How about a GDI Mammoth? Yeah, give it a couple of weeks

These are not lovely bonus toys heaped on top of an overflowing box of delights. These are the game's core units, drip-fed to you over days or weeks, and only in response to successfully killing tons of enemies and levelling up. Jump immediately online the day you buy the game, and you'll have access to about four units. Sure, hitting Tier 2 only takes

a few missions or matches, and will double that roster, but it's absurd. It's insane. It's ludicrous. It's preposterous. It's being made to wait and to work for something you've paid for, not patting thing to unlock a variant weapon in an

This is as far as you can zoom out. Stupid camera.

> online shooter, but denying you access to most of the tech tree until you've put the hours in is not how RTS games work.

Well, wouldja look

AT-AT that.



Unlocked units are supposed to provide choice instead of advantages, but that's utter nonsense. It is possible to win by swarming a Tier 3 enemy with Tier 1 units, but it's harder going and not much fun. To the game's credit, XP is earned from multiplayer, single-player, co-op and skirmishes alike, but it's still a long road to the best stuff.

As a final smack upon your red-raw buttocks, the two factions - GDI and Nod - have to be levelled up separately. You don't have to fight hard and fight well to get everything - you just have to play and wait and wait and play and play and wait, and that's incredibly boring.

Dear EA: You are total bastards. Love, everyone who bought C&C4.

Worse still, the persistent unlock system is used to justify an anti-piracy measure that's the equal of Ubisoft's always-online DRM for pure contempt.

you on the head for doing well. It's one



WOT NO SCRIN? Fan service fail

Outside of Kane, there are no returning characters in Command & Conquer 4 - and no celebrity cameos either. It's supposed to be grim and gritty rather than campy, so the story goes EA didn't want to distract players with famous faces. Unfortunately, it's a really flat story with some really irritating actors - most especially the unnamed player character's ever-teary wife, who manages to repeatedly return despite situations that should have killed her.

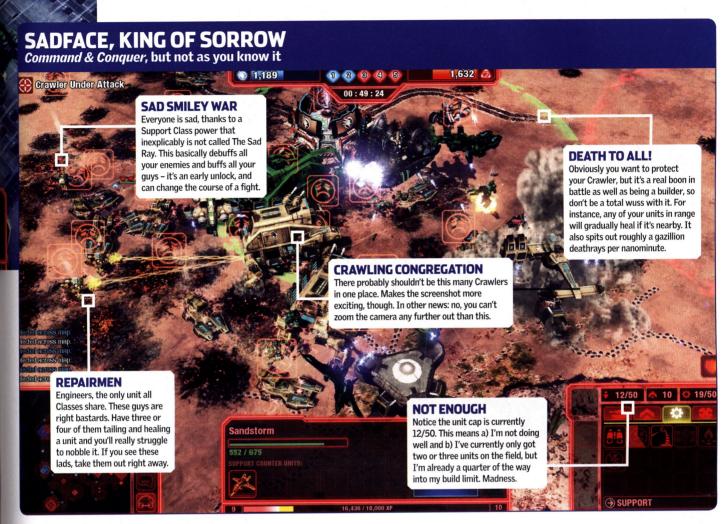
The really serious loss are the Scrin, the third playable faction introduced in C&C3. EA say they didn't feel they had the time and resources to do them justice, so they've been left out entirely. Given their C&C3 campaign ended with them planning a full-scale invasion of Earth, this makes no sense.

Even worse, you're repeatedly told you're fighting around the massive tower they left on Earth, but the pokey, samey maps don't seem capable

of showing it. There's no sign of Legion, the Nod supercomputer that C&C3: Kane's Wrath was hung around either. All told, it's a bunch of glaring holes – and what we're left with instead is a promise that the C&C website will eventually be filled with

all the lore and exposition left out of the game. Ooh, HTML! Thanks!





No matter what mode you're in, if you lose your internet connection for any reason, you're kicked out of the game until it resumes. Progress will be lost, and train-based boredom will not be killed. Is this a worthwhile for having your XP, unlocks and scores constantly monitored and updated? The answer begins with "n", ends with "o bloody way"...

All that said, when you've played long enough to unlock a decent clutch of units and enter the fray with a bunch of people in a similar position to you, the game does feels right, turning into the bastard child of World in Conflict and Company of Heroes - it has the instant action appeal of the former and the tug-of-war

"Lose your internet connection, and you're kicked out of the game"



Frankly, it's just not C&C without base-building and harvesters, but with the right unlocks and the right players it has a bloomin' good go at being epic scifi warfare. Co-operation is key, and also hard to avoid: as one vs one currently is the only way to fight entirely alone. You need a Defence player setting up turrets to guard caps, a Support guy deploying his magic powers to bail you out of a fraught fight, and you need an Offence player to get into that fraught fight in the first place. Things clicks together when all multiplayer pieces are in place, but it's unfulfilling in single-player.

While longevity hangs upon the multiplayer mode, and the potential string of patches and DLC - aargh! unlocks therein, the reason this game really exists are the previous title's singleplayer modes. People have grown up with C&C for 15 years; they're buying to find out what happens, and to have some neat scripted missions.

I've already banged on about how pathetic the story is, but the missions fall short too. The trouble with the new structure, regardless of its multiplayer merits, is that it permits very little variation. It's just a race to biff some other stuff on small, palpably arena-like maps. It tries to insert a little more oomph - a giant spaceship at one point, a tiny Kane pixel-man at another - here and there, but it feels limited and cheap.

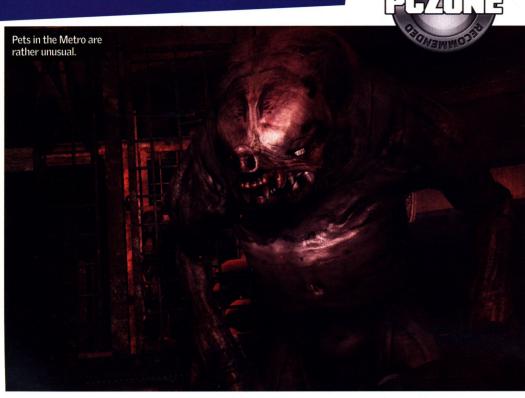
Knowing that most of the developers were set to lose their jobs once C&C4 was completed, and that this game began as an RTS that was unrelated to prior C&C releases it's hard not feel that this was a compromised project. If it is indeed the last gasp of C&C as we know

it, it's an incredibly sad way to go out. With a little more money, a little more time and a whole lot more reverence for what makes C&C C&C, the tiny exploding acorn underneath this confused, scrawny thing could have become a mighty oak of modern strategy. Take care of yourself, Mr Kane. It was good while it lasted.



Damp sticky mess

REVIEWSMETRO2033





David Brown isn't convinced this underground is worse than London's

DEVELOPER 4A Games **PUBLISHER** THQ WEBSITE metro2033game.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE £39.99**



Call of Duty meets STALKER in an atmospheric FPS set in the dark world of the Moscow Metro after a devastating nuclear war.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

Core 2 Duo processor, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 8800 or GT220 or better graphics card with Shader Model 3

HOW IT STACKS

MODERN WARFARE 2 94%

METRO 2033 80%

CRYOSTASIS 80%

HEN YOU KNOW a game is about wandering around the tunnels of a large underground train system you'd be forgiven for expecting a corridor shooter. Certainly, if Metro 2033's developers were a bunch of lazy sods, then that's what you'd have got.

Pleasingly, Metro 2033 does a good job of relieving the claustrophobic tension of a subterranean life, giving you opportunities to stretch your legs on the surface. Critics will, rightly in a way, say these open-air bits are just corridors without obvious walls, but that's exactly what the Call of Duty games use, and that hasn't stopped them being critically and commercially successful. While Metro 2033 isn't a classic, it's important to nip the whole "well, it's too linear" argument in the bud. It doesn't matter if a game is linear if it's presented in a brilliantly stylish, atmospheric way.

THE GOOD...

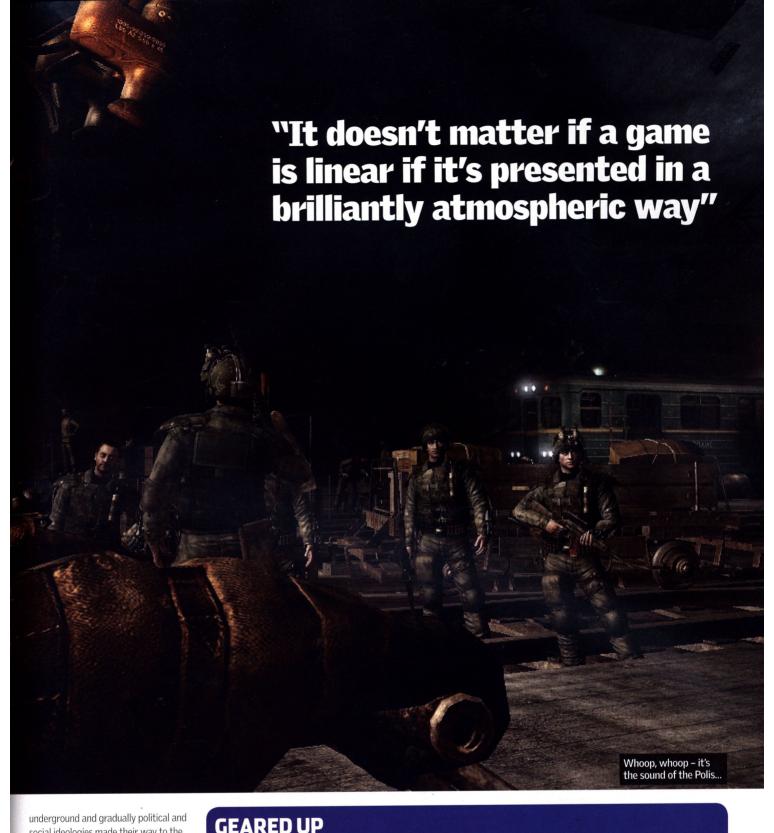
There are definitely things wrong with Metro 2033 that bring it substantially short of a Classic award, but it's usual to first talk about what a game does right before going on to what it doesn't.



If you're going to attempt to compete with the big boys in the linear FPS genre, you've got to do something special with your scenario and nail the feel of the world right from the start. This is exactly what 4A have done, providing a world to explore that's beautiful, yet utterly bleak and terrifying at the same time. It really does look sensational at times, especially if you've got the computing oomph to use DirectX 11 and push the graphics settings all the way up to 'Very High'. It'll make your eyes bleed with wonderment,

especially when you get to the more expansive areas, like Polis, What's Polis? Ah, let's talk plot.

Based on a book by the Russian author Dmitry Glukhovsky, Metro 2033 sees you playing as Artyom, a strapping whippersnapper who's lived in the northernmost parts of Moscow's Metro ever since a devastating nuclear conflict wiped out humanity on the surface of the Earth (at least, as far as anyone knows). Forty thousand people managed to hide in the twisting tunnels of Moscow's



underground and gradually political and social ideologies made their way to the fore. Despite surviving a holocaust, the people quickly began to bicker and fight amongst themselves, turning to Nazism, Bolshevism and other political movements and grouping themselves together in different stations.

When a new threat of powerful creatures, Dark Ones, threatens Artyom's station, he's dispatched to Polis - the centre of the Metro and the grandest section of the entire system - in order to deliver a warning message to the authorities there.

For all intents and purposes, this journey is a relatively simple

MASKED MAN

The gas mask is an essential companion when you go outside, but only has a limited supply of air. Check how long you have left by glancing at your watch.



GLORIFIED G

Know your equipment and you might just survive

This pellet gun can be deadly when used effectively, to do maximum damage, you need to manually crank up the air pressure, which can be dangerous in combat.



SEE THE LIGHT

In a world as dark as this, a torch is invaluable. To make it work, you need to crank the battery. Do this regularly: you don't want it failing in the middle of a fight.



CLOSE COMBAT

This shotgun's rounds are loaded individually. Holding down the reload key is the only way your character will take the time to fill up gun. That's something to remember.

REVIEWSMETRO2033





> FPS affair. Mutant rushes you, shoot mutant, reload, move on. Just replace 'mutant' with 'human' depending on the scenario. We shouldn't pretend that, at its heart. Metro won't be familiar to anyone who's ever played an FPS before. The key is how it's presented, in terms of atmospheric elements, and the feel of combat and stealth. The former is flawless, a superb representation of what it might be like to exist in a world as desolate as this. The latter is where things fall down slightly.

THE BAD...

There's a slight disconnection with the bullets you fire and the impact made on enemies, apart from when you use stealth and take out enemies with one shot. When you're in a pitched battle, things can sometimes feel a bit distant, as if you don't feel like your bullets are hitting the enemies, or at least you don't feel satisfied with the impact that they are making.



The smoothness of the combat is a key element of an FPS. It's an obvious thing really, but that doesn't stop many falling desperately short of satisfying the player. Metro 2033's combat isn't that bad, and sometimes it works very well indeed, but it's never as solid as a Call of Duty. It's best moments are when you fight humans, from which you can gauge damage and pain more easily. Think of Crysis and the difference between fighting the Koreans and the aliens.

Stealth missions, coupled with checkpoint saves (Metro 2033 lacks a quick save function), is the other major gripe. Usually, the checkpoints are fine,

"One of the most atmospheric and intriguing games of many a year"

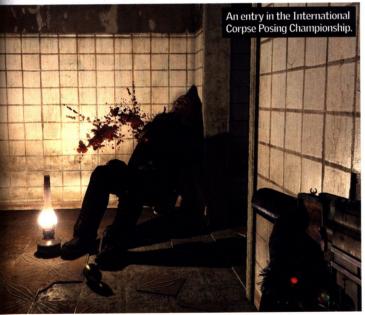
only forcing a tiny bit of a retread, but in stealth missions, oh dear. If you like to complete stealth missions perfectly (ie never be seen), the checkpoint system is a total bastard. Each reload - either voluntary after being spotted, or after being seen and promptly slaughtered sends you miles back. When you consider the numerous ways to alert the guards accidentally flipping your light on, broken glass on the ground etc - you can end up being terrified of moving. That's realistic

to an extent, but a bit of leeway would have been good. Or just the ability to save whenever you like. Either one would have done.

On a more technical note, the game needs a more detailed graphics settings than it has at the moment. The version we reviewed only has standardised settings - Low, Medium, High, Very High - and, tantalisingly, you can see what stuff, like ambient occlusion and other guff, gets turned on and off when







you switch. But you can't change these detailed settings, at least not in-game. We suspect modders will find a way very soon after the game's release, until then we're stuck with the defaults. This causes a little bit of a problem, as Medium turns too much stuff off and High leaves too much on. It's a relatively minor niggle, as the game still looks pretty damn good on either setting.

All this complaining might make you think this is a poor game, but it's far from that. When it works, Metro 2033 is one

of the most atmospheric and intriguing games of many a year. Nobody does despair and bleak like the Russians, and this game is no exception. If you want to see a nuclear future devoid of all hope and joy, this is where you need to come it makes Fallout 3's irradiated wasteland look like summer fields.

The experience is unique and brilliant for it, the crushing depression serving to make moments of beauty all the more important. After hours spent in the darkest of dark tunnels, the moment

when you finally get to Polis is a joyous one, made so much more so because of what went on before. More moments like this follow, but to mention them would be to enter into spoiler territory. Suffice it to say that you'll be experiencing many moments where you just want to take wonder at your surroundings.

AND THE PRETTY

If all you want to do is shoot soldiers in big generic multiplayer maps then you need to steer clear of Metro 2033. If you can't see beyond the obvious scenarios or are unwilling to take a detour from the well-trodden path of familiar shooter settings, avert your eyes from the screenshots on these pages. They hold nothing for you. This game is for people who like to go beyond the norm, without necessarily stepping out of their gaming comfort zones. It's a mixture of the usual and the out there, but, sadly, its fantastic features don't make up for its foibles.

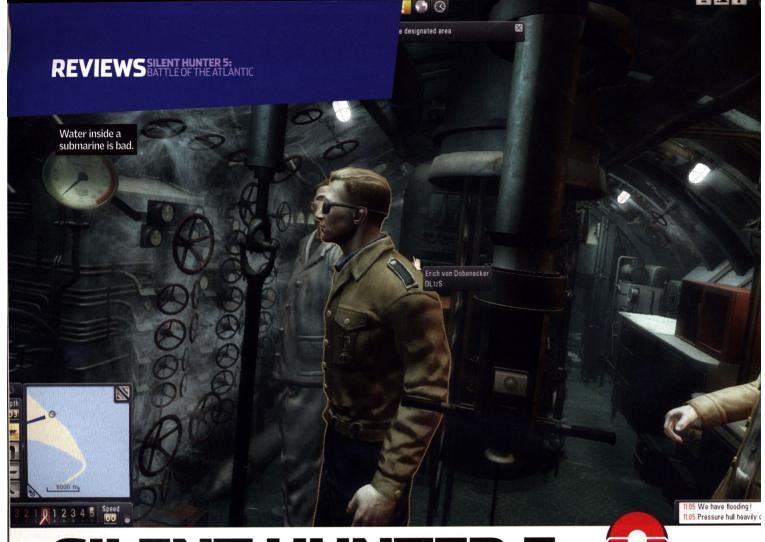
This is a game where you can go from an ecstatic high to a tongue-chewing low within the space of a short chapter, perhaps illustrated best in the way the game is structured – the near-instant load times are tempered by each level being very small. There are a lot of load screens, but none of them take up more than a few seconds of your time.

Metro 2033 is a great game from a company that's never produced anything before. It's something that can be built on and, with a couple of clever patches, even its issues can be ironed out. 4A have proved they can do it - no longer is the shortage of ammo seen in the preview builds an issue - but at the moment, Metro 2033 falls just short of greatness. It gets an absolutely hearty recommendation from us then, but we can go no further. The Classic tunnel is blocked for now, but that's no reason you shouldn't strap on a gas mask and go exploring. PEZ

GRAPHICS Sublime SOUND Excellent, especially the Russian voices **MULTIPLAYER** Niet

- Wonderful visuals
- Unique, exciting setting
- Incredible atmosphere
- Interesting weapons and gadgets
- Combat isn't always satisfying
- Checkpoint saves





SILENT HUNTER 5: BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

Run silent, run deep says Adam Glick, if the game runs at all

DEVELOPER Ubisoft **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft WEBSITE silent-hunter.uk.ubi.com **ETA** Out now PRICE £25

AT A GLANCE...

Take to the seas in a Nazi U-boat during WWII to battle planes, storms, munitions shortages and actual battles

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 3GHz Pentium Core 2 Duo, 2GB RAM, and a 512MB Geforce 8800 GTS. Internet required for DRM.

HOW IT STACKS

ERE'S HOW A submarine sim should make you feel: mad, awesome and terrified. You're piloting a tube carrying 10,000lb of explosives packed in with dozens of moist men, you're the size of a whale, and your only real defence from enemy warships is hiding. When U-boats in WWII were submerged the crews actually had to whisper to one another, else enemy hydrophones might pick them up. It's mad. And awesome. And terrifying.

Here's how Silent Hunter 5 makes you feel: sad, let down, and annoyed. On my first patrol I hadn't travelled 200 miles when I noticed my hull integrity had dropped to 84%. This produced the same emotion you'd get driving a car away from the dealer and grazing a granite wall on your way home.

This wasn't from carelessness - I'd been floating through open waters -Silent Hunter 5 is just the buggiest, most bizarrely unfinished title this series has ever seen. The word leaky doesn't

even apply. As if being a U-boat captain wasn't rough enough, you'll also have to deal with the assorted nightmares of a crew who won't do what you say, your ship itself not functioning properly and a high command who will, on occasions, refuse to believe that you've completed your mission. Oh, and domineering DRM that means the game quits if your internet connection drops and you lose access to Ubisoft's verification servers.

The missions are one of SH5's few new features. In a relatively bold move, instead of simply picking your U-boat and year and heading off by yourself,

SH5's single-player game consists of a campaign. Throughout the game you upgrade your sub and crew from mission to mission, and even watch your crew open up to you as more incidental dialogue about their home life, hobbies or fears become unlocked.

This is all entertaining in theory but dismal in execution. The fact that you have to play through the entire campaign in order means there's no dropping straight into the 1943 era, when submarine tech and antisubmarine tech makes this whole underwater struggle more interesting.



CREW CUTS

These are the chaps you share a tube with



ERICH VON DOBENECKER

NICKNAME: Chuckles **DISPOSITION:** Ornery

SKILLS: Your XO can tell your whole crew to either enter battle stations or begin silent running. I once forgot to turn battle stations off before plotting a course back to Germany, leaving my crew hunched at their posts for days.



TORPEDO OFFICER KURT FAUST

NICKNAME: The Tender Lover **DISPOSITION:** Tubular

SKILLS: Faust can overcharge or preheat torpedoes. The former grants extra speed and range at the cost of accuracy. The latter causes more damage. No idea why though.

Submariners like red lights.

Reminds them of brothels.



COOK OLAF HACKLÄNDER

NICKNAME: Bum Spud **DISPOSITION:** Saltv

SKILLS: Olaf has a passive skill which increases the whole boat's morale, and he can also whip up special meals using the ship's reserve supplies. Great for when you've accidentally left everybody on battle stations for a week.

÷ 000







No. you're stuck sinking endless unquarded merchant vessels until the Kriegsmarine decide you've suffered enough and summon you home, skipping the plot forward another few months. And your crew have so little to say, and do such a poorly acted job of saying it, that they become cardboard vessels for your growing hate.

Why did that torpedo miss? Why can't I control the rudder directly? It's your fault, isn't it, Soundman Scheu! You're some kind of spy-bastard! I'll have you flogged!

UP PERISCOPE

Designing improvements as dramatic as 'Missions' was presumably such a Herculean effort that Ubisoft simply didn't have much energy to spend on the tutorial or interface, which are both hulking piles of crap.

The tutorial stops after you've learned how to move your boat around and fire torpedoes at unarmed ships, leaving you woefully unprepared for any kind of combat against aggressors, and the UI is a horror film.

Controlling your ship is done via little buttons around the very edge of the screen, running straight up to different crew members in first-person view and telling them to do something to their faces, and a pop-out tactical map which has two sizes: tiny, and so big it covers the torpedo control panel.

Everything is fiddly, nothing is where you want it and in trying to simplify the information you receive the game ends

up refusing to tell you certain

"Since the AI's equally broken you won't have to deal with the usual challenges of U-boat warfare"

information you need to know. The

distance between yourself and the sea floor, for instance.

The game isn't all bad though. Since the AI's equally broken you won't have to deal with the usual challenges of U-boat warfare, like merchant ships running away, planes dropping bombs or destroyers actually hunting you. So there's a relief, of sorts. There's also immediate excitement to be found in the game's brilliant U-boat vs Destroyer multiplayer game. So it's just a shame it suffers the same engine, interface, bugs and connectivity issues.

However much fun the multiplayer side of Silent Hunter 5 is, it doesn't make up for the transparent fact that this particular sim has surfaced well before it was ready. PCZ



GRAPHICS Some impressive

SOUND Good booms. Bad chatter **MULTIPLAYER** Available. Buggy

Occasionally atmospheric

Prettiest Silent Hunter to date

Transparently not finished

Miserable interface

Restrictive structure



REVIEWS DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS – AWAKENING



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS-AWAKENING David Brown wonders where all his friends went





DEVELOPER BioWare **PUBLISHER** EA WEBSITE dragonage.bioware.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE £19.99**

PENDING A LONG time with a group of characters to push my roque archer to the end of the main Dragon Age game, meant I got to become familiar with them.

When Awakenina, the first proper expansion in what will likely be a long list of new material for BioWare's epic RPG, kicks off, you've got a load of new people wandering around with you. (Actually, one of them isn't new, he's just a guy from the main game I didn't care about much.) This is perhaps one of the biggest letdowns about Awakening, which does all the basics exactly right.

The new characters just can't replace the ones you spent so many hours with. Frankly, they're not as interesting to roam around with. As you'll be doing just as much dungeon and forest crawling as you did in the first game (25 hours worth, if the figures are to be believed) then it's a shame you'll be doing it with a bunch of people you don't like much.

But enough character assassination, Awakening is all about big lists of new stuff being added to the main game. And that's really what an expansion should be about: expanding on what came before. To this end, BioWare have

crammed in more than 500 new objects, two new specialisations for each class, five more recruitable characters, loads of new skills, spells and abilities, and some useful objects that were glaring omissions from the main game, such as stamina potions.

NEW DUDE

Awakening also tells a new story intriguing, but not Earth shattering about the darkspawn hanging after the climax of Origins. This means you spend the first hour fighting the same enemies you did for ages in the main game: hurlocks, grenlocks, emissaries and alphas. It's only right at the end of the first chapter that you meet the new chief bad guy who's a variation on a theme: a talking darkspawn.

Once you've dealt with him, you get to start doing the cool new thing in Awakening: governing your land. As the slayer of the arch demon, you get to take over the lands of a guy you killed in the main game, with decisions about funding, trade and such making up a crude management aspect. This might sound a bit rubbish, but it's surprisingly cool to feel like your efforts in the main game didn't go unnoticed.

Don't get us wrong - Awakenings isn't as good as the main Dragon Age game, but it was never going to be. It was just going to be more of the same, done the same way, with a few cherries on top (like a supply chest to keep your excess equipment in). There's the feeling that more could have been done here. but those particular cherries are nice to have, and the wealth of new material makes this worthy purchase.

GRAPHICS The same **SOUND** The same MULTIPLAYER Nay, my liege

- Huge amount of content Lots of new stuff
- More of what you love
- More of what you didn't love
- Uninteresting characters



AT A GLANCE...

First proper expansion for the epic BioWare RPG with new items, characters, enemies and an increased level cap, plus a whole new story.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

1.6GHz processor, 1GB RAM (1.5GB Vista/7), and a 128MB graphics card (256MB Vista/7). Requires Dragon Age: Origins

HOW IT STACKS

REVIEWSCHAOSRISING



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II – CHAOS RISING

Alec Meer makes Space Marines get their armour mucky

DEVELOPER Relic PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com **ETA** Out now PRICE £39

AT A GLANCE...

A standalone expansion for the divisive Warhammer 40,000 strategy-RPG seguel. Now with more tarnishing of noble souls.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

3.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM (1.5GB Vista/7), and an NVIDIA GeForce 6600 GT or ATI Radeon X1600 or better graphics card, with Shader Model 3 support

HOW IT STACKS

HEY GOT IT right. Looked a bit touch and go there for a while, didn't it? While Dawn of War II was the best Frankensteinian gestalt of strategy and role-playing to date, there were only so many times that walking north up a map until you reached a circular bit with a slightly bigger Tyranid in it could remain entertaining and surprising. "Oh! A big Tyranid! How did you know? Um - did you keep the receipt?

In Chaos Rising there's no more of that: missions are scripted, sculpted things, escalating fights packed with apocalyptically crumbling environments, a surprisingly engrossing story and a whole bunch of ethical choices.

Yes, your real-time strategy game now includes moral deliberation - which is a step forward for a genre that's usually about "Shall I build this little man, or this other little man?" As you play the game, you can be careful, considerate and painstaking to keep your clutch of Space Marines pure, or you can grab and smash everything and hang the consequences, which duly corrupts your guys. The further they turn towards the Dark Side - sorry, Chaos - the more brutally cool abilities

and perks they unlock. The trouble is they'll lose other abilities, and access to some rather tasty armour and weapons.

The best course of action depends not only on your own personal ethics (eg shall I take the long way, or slaughter my way through a bunch of my mates to get there guicker?) but also on your hunger for tasty powers and items. It's a clever balancing act, making it harder than you'd have thought to stick doggedly to one extreme. Better yet, it's genuinely woven into the story. There are twists, and they are splendid twists.

FALLING HEROES

The major bullet point for this, arguably overpriced, standalone expansion is the return of Chaos and its Marines to DOW. These are a perverted take on Space Marines, who are more about punch than speed, and have a few demons thrown in for good measure.

While Chaos Rising's single-player game is a revelation after DOW2, the multiplayer hasn't changed much - it's just enlarged significantly by the inclusion of Chaos and new units. It's a shame these missions aren't a bit wilder, but they fit well, and turn a game that could feel small into a big and beefy one.

Best of all, Relic have dropped an enormous patch for Dawn of War II to ensure that the game's player base isn't split. Once applied to DOW2 players can face off with those playing Chaos Rising, without needing this expansion.

Chaos Rising a splendid next step for Dawn of War II, that avoids the easy route of simply fixing the last game or simply continuing on as before. It does both, and then some. PEZ



GRAPHICS All they need to be **SOUND** Great orchestral music **MULTIPLAYER** Still daunting

Best single-player RTS

Loads of replay value

Player base isn't split

Too easy to undo evil choices

Expensive

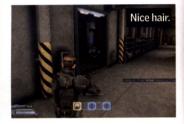


REVIEWS STARGATE:









STARGATE: RESISTANCE

David Brown demands you resist the urge to spend money

DEVELOPER Cheyenne Mountain **PUBLISHER** FireSky **WEBSITE** stargateresistance.com **ETA** Out now PRICE £12.99 on Steam



HERE'S USING A license to the full, like Batman: Arkham Asylum. Then there's throwing out a cheap, cobbled-together mess, like nearly every licensed game ever. Then there's Staraate: Resistance, a third-person multiplayer action game with as much charisma as a dead chartered accountant.

I'm almost at a loss for words as to how to being talking about this game, so let's start by saying that you have to endure a sign-up on FireSky's website to be able to play this game. That'd be OK if there was any other reason to go back to the site afterwards, but there isn't.

Mind you, it's a blessing in disguise, as it prevents you from actually getting into the game for a few minutes. A few more precious seconds you have to spend with your mind before it is iettisoned out your ear the second it perceives the horrid sludge erupting all over your screen in the name of entertainment. Although sometimes the best games are contained with ugly shells, this isn't the case here. The character models are woeful, making the merely average environments look far more impressive than they actually are in comparison.

The bits where you zip through a stargate are reasonable, but other than that, only a madman would describe this shooter as visually pleasing.

Then you realise there are, currently, only three maps. Talk about spoilt for choice! However will you choose which one to play? Perhaps you'll just go for the one server that has some people playing on it. At least overpopulated servers will never be a problem with Stargate: Resistance.

Even when you do get to play with people, every game is eerily silent and you might as well just be playing with bots, such is the level of interaction between players. Perhaps they're all just depressed at having spent money on this cow pat of a game.

COW PAT

As an attempt at variety, there are six classes to choose from and a couple of game modes. And what exhilarating, original choices these are: team deathmatch, capture the tech (aka flag), and one called domination. The classes aren't much better, just your usual soldier, medic, engineer and sneaky spy options. Again, no real thought has gone into this, it's just a rip-off of all the other mods and multiplayer games that have flooded the market in recent years.

Mentioning mods was deliberate, because this is no better than your

average user-created experience. The difference here is it requires a pointless user account to be created and costs some money to play. If this was a free mod, which is what it feels like, then I'd be much more lenient, but this is such a cynical attempt to rake in some cash from unsuspecting punters that it can't be treated with any sympathy. By asking for money, FireSky are putting themselves up against the cream of the crop and Stargate: Resistance just fails miserably in almost every respect.

GRAPHICS Ugly models **SOUND** Barely noticeable **MULTIPLAYER** The only way

- Nice stargate effect
- Weak to dreadful visuals
- Lacking atmosphere
- ₩ Worse than UT3 mods
- Stupid registration



AT A GLANCE...

Online-only third-person Stargate multiplayer game with very few players and very little fun involved.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a NVIDIA 7800GT or ATI Radeon x800 or higher.

HOW IT STACKS



PREPARE FOR BATTLE



STREET FIGHTER IV VS. ASSASSIN'S CREED II



















The world's biggest gaming awards are back and bigger than ever!

The Golden Joystick Awards celebrate the very best of gaming. That's because they're voted for by the people who really count - you! So, in the ultimate battle for gaming supremacy, which games will come out on top? Street Fighter IV or God Of War III? New Super Mario Bros or Assassin's Creed II? The longlist voting opens on 4 May so visit goldenjoystick.com to make sure your favourite games come out fighting.

REVIEWSM.U.D.TV



DEVELOPER Realmforge Studios **PUBLISHER** Kalypso Media WEBSITE mud-tv.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE £29.99**

F YOU'VE EVER wondered what it's like deciding what shows appear on TV channels like BBC Three, look no further for your gaming satisfaction. MUD TV gives you the power and privilege of being a TV scheduler, entering into the thrilling world of moving things around on a screen to gain virtual viewers.

Instead of endless repeats of Two Pints of Lager..., MUD TV gives you the chance to create and schedule Simsesque formless video clips which represent the shows, with nauseating bobblehead characters and a thick vein of Germanic humour running through the whole thing.

Essentially, the game boils down to placing programmes on the schedule at the best times to attract enough audiences to fulfil advertising contracts. At heart, MUD TV's multiplayer adds

Hire employees down here

a tiny bit extra in terms of direct competition, but otherwise it's the same thing. One thing could have made MUD TV a lot better - a Movies-style makingyour-own shows facility - but instead of anything that creative you just get looped footage of babbling bobbleheads that drives you insane within minutes, if the music doesn't get you first.

RUNAROUND

To get things done you have a character that you move into different rooms in your company's building, each room essentially representing a menu. There's a place for writers to create shows and a studio to film the finished articles. while research unlocks new rooms in traditional management game style.

The unusual thing is that to access most of the features in the game, you have to walk your character through these rooms. If you want to hire a new employee, you have to walk your guy into the lobby, go down to the bottom level of your building, walk to the worker area and then hire them. Then go back to the room you want to the worker to work in and assign them to a task.

As you can imagine, this gets frustrating very quickly and is certainly an idea that works better on paper than it does in-game. There's a certain amount of credit due for not presenting the player with an endless menus, but in the end they're all still there - it just takes longer to flick between them.

We also suppose it's designed to simulate the frantic rushing about someone at a TV station might have to do. But if realism was the aim, why use cartoon bobbleheads?

AT A GLANCE...

Business simulator where you control a TV station, commissioning shows and editing schedules to fulfil advertising contracts.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0 support

HOW IT STACKS

THE MOVIES 95%

THEME HOSPITAL 910/0

M.U.D TV 45%

GRAPHICS Embarrassing bobblehead nonsense **SOUND** Hellish music and vocals **MULTIPLAYER** Basic competitive options

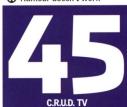
Scheduling isn't overly dull

Can't create your own shows

Bobbleheads

Moving the character is annoying

Humour doesn't work



REVIEWSRISEOFPRUSSIA









RISE OF PRUSSIA

David Brown is probably the wurst general in history

DEVELOPER AGEOD **PUBLISHER** Paradox Interactive WEBSITE paradoxplaza.com/ games/rise-of-prussia **ETA** Out now **PRICE** £24.99

S FAR AS historical scenarios go, the Seven Years War between Frederick the Great's Prussia and an alliance of Austria, Russia and a few other places, isn't necessarily the most exhilarating choice to base a game on. However, it gets attention because AGEOD aren't just doing yet another World War II battle simulator.

More credit is due to this French outfit, as they're formed from only two (to our knowledge) people, a bevy of

industrious volunteers, and a pro-active community who create their own games using the same engines that power AGEOD's main titles, like this here Rise of Prussia, Birth of America and so on.

These games are labours of love and so are immensely detailed on the historical side and impenetrable on the gameplay side. To be fair though, this game is much easier on the brain than AGEOD's last game (World War One, issue 203, 65%). I felt like I could progress beyond the easiest levels of difficulty at some point, which is something I've never been able to sav before about an AGEOD title.

OLD TIME WARFARE

Each game turn lasts 15 days, with units represented by a portrait of their leader, a 3D figurine (which doesn't look as good) or a depiction of the type of unit it is (a man on a horse for a cavalry unit, for example).

Units are assigned to brigades, which are in corps and then armies, all lead by bigwig generals. It's all part of the Chain of Command, which is a concept drummed into you during the painful text-based tutorials.

They try to be accessible, but your eyes will be running down your

cheeks like eggy yolks before you reach the end of them.

Other problems include an interface that has a lot of small buttons and sometimes-intrusive tooltips, combat that's as riveting as watching a David Niven film and a 'ledger' that's a massive splodge of numbers and lists – fine for the enthusiast, but to a newcomer? It's just scary. So while AGEOD maintain their fine tradition of delivering hardcore strategies, casual strategists are again out in the cold, unless they were to find it for a fiver somewhere. And, amusingly, Rise of Prussia is, by far, their most accessible game yet. Keep trying, guys, you may just crack it in the end. PCZ

AT A GLANCE...

Hardcore strategy from the makers of a slew of other grand strategy games, set during the Seven Years War.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

1.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

RISE OF PRUSSIA 68%

WORLD WAR ONE 65%



Old Freddy

boy himself.



GRAPHICS Maps and portraits

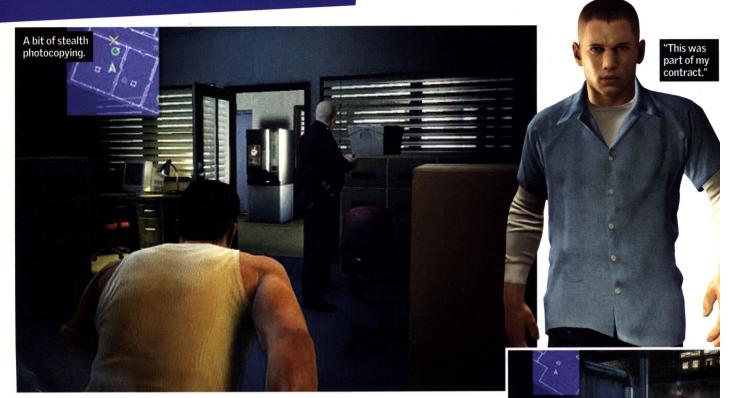
SOUND Minimal, some classical

MULTIPLAYER Play-by-email

Very in-depth

Unique scenario

More accessible...



PRISON BREAK: THE CONSPIRACY

Steve Hogarty admires bricks, hates the rest

DEVELOPER Zootfly **PUBLISHER** Deep Silver **WEBSITE** prisonbreak. deepsilver.com ETA Out now **PRICE** £2999

AT A GLANCE...

The game of the TV show, which went bad after the first season. You know, after they broke out of prison.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a NVidia 7800+ or ATI X1800 graphics card with Shader 3.0 support

HOW IT STACKS

PRISON BREAK

LOST: VIA DOMUS 32%

HESE ARE LOVELY bricks. In fact Prison Break probably has the best in-game brickwork I've seen. If you can find a better brick in another game, you can take a real brick and cave my skull in with it. Through the wonders of parallax mapping (and they are wonders), you'll feel you can almost reach out and touch each individual brick, run your fingertips along its coarse, roughhewn surface. They're great bricks. Brillo bricks.

Everything else is a bit rubbish. In Prison Break: The Conspiracy you play Tom Paxton, a retroactively invented character who's been slipped into (or rather in between) events of the first season of the TV show. As such, you can have no effect or involvement in the show's main plot. You're constantly confined to the periphery of the main character's - Michael Scofield's - vision, hovering about in the background. peeking out at him from around corners and sliding out from under his bed while he sleeps. Don't let the TV cameras catch you, otherwise you'll create a universe-searing paradox

Paxton's plot-dodging adventures lead him along a series of linear levels, each one set in and around the prison, and task him with retrieving a string of objects. Computer records, ID cards, medicine, sharp things, that sort of stuff. The stealth system can be summarised like this: press Q to hug corners, then jump when an NPC looks the other way. When you're not doing that, you're fighting, a system which can also be summarised with damning little effort: left-click for a weak attack, right-click for a strong attack, and Shift to block

PRISON BORE

Even getting caught is a fun-less chore, as the action freezes and the camera slowly pans to the austere, boggle-eyed face of the guard who spotted you, before lobbing you back to the last checkpoint. Quick-time events break up the action in much the same way as sonorous flatulence punctuates a big poo, while mini-games like weight-lifting and underground fighting offer a meaningless and repetitive keyhammering distraction.

The real actors are used, if you were wondering, but clearly some of them are more in demand than others. Scofield's lines total five, maybe six sentences. Mob boss Abruzzi does most of the talking here, but he's hardly tier-one Prison Break cast. Disappointing all round. One for the brick fans only, I'm afraid. PCZ

Pinch him on the arse for extra points.



MULTIPLAYER Two player fights

Terrific bricks

Decent likenesses to actors

Basic stealth

Simple fighting

Tedious missions





FLOTILLA Toucan play this game

DEVELOPER Blendo Games **PUBLISHER** Blendo Games WEBSITE blendogames.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE** \$10 (about £6.70)

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

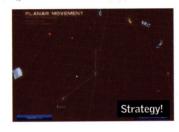
1GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a DirectXcompatible graphics card.

HERE ARE THREE amazing things about Flotilla. The first is that its crawling, ponderousyet-majestic space battles are audially accompanied by Chopin, providing a hit of instant class that, alongside the game's beautifully low-fi art style, makes Flotilla one stylish bastard. Secondly, those space battles are carried out in a way we've very cleverly dubbed 'simulturneous'. (Don't worry, we Googled that, and nobody else has managed to be quite as smart as us).

What our invented term means is that both you and the AI choose your actions for one 30 second turn - planar movement, vertical movement, orientation and priority targeting before they're all carried out simultaneously. Entry level strategising requires guessing where your opponent is about to move. More advanced players can worry about guessing where he's guessing you're guessing he's going. Weaknesses on ships' flanks mean that orientation and weapon range are also important.







Thirdly: utter whimsy. Between battles you encounter short text-form scenarios. Your choices here trigger events further in the story. Allow the toucan stowaways aboard, and they might steal some technology. Salvage a haunted ship and you might get stalked by a Brumak. It's nonsense, but it tinges Flotilla with wonderful humour.

You eventually succumb to space illness, so properly developing your flotilla is impossible. And the scenarios repeat themselves after subsequent adventures. This leaves Flotilla without any goal, or a feeling of progression. Stylish, funny, but sadly disposable. Steve Hogarty

PCZONE



THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM All roads lead to roam

DEVELOPER Blue Byte **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft WEBSITE thesettlers.us.ubi.com **ETA** Out now PRICE £35

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

2GHz processor, 2GB RAM, 256MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0. Constant internet connection required.

ATCHING THESE GAMES are almost as much fun as playing them, and that's not a back-handed compliment. There's something so calming about watching The Settlers' little cartoon people building their houses and living their lives, even when you know you're meant to be getting worked up about Ubisoft's DRM. Look how cute they are! Who cares that having to be online for the single-player is the worst idea since laxative bath salts?

Luckily, it's multiplayer that takes the focus in *The Settlers 7* anyway. As ever, the basic idea is still to build villages, set up a functioning economy and expand your influence to the heathen realms not yet under your iron glove, but this time that's the start. Winning is all about getting Victory Points from goals that can be anything from having the biggest civilisation to being the first to conquer an important landmark. There's no way you can pick up all of them, turning a







series that's often been as slow as continental drift into a battle where every click counts – a scrap for points that can be stolen, a race to be first to others that you're positioned to grab.

The catch is that keeping all these balls in the air means an absolute ton of very German micromanagement, and The Settlers 7 isn't great at warning you if you've screwed up. This complexity isn't necessarily a problem, and there's a very solid game underneath, but definitely trust your gut to tell you if its pretty juggling act will be your thing.

Richard Cobbett



State of Play

Increasingly developers tinker with their creations long after their release. With this in mind, every month we cast fresh eyes on the changes seen in long-running games...



N UPDATE TO Portal arrived recently, the patch notes of which read: "Changed radio transmission frequency to comply with federal and state spectrum management regulations."

The jargon-heavy sentence was easily overlooked, just another note atop a list of previous updates whose changes are too banal to even register: "Updated the particle rendering code and particle data files to make them compatible with the particle editor included in the Source SDK", says one, "Updated the engine to report SteamIDs using the Steam_0 format instead of Steam_1," another.

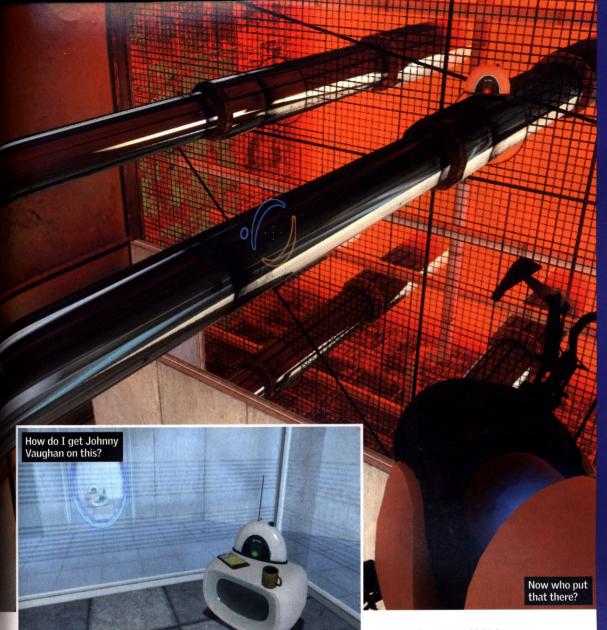
You'd be forgiven for not noticing that Valve had just added a string of 26 new puzzles to their space-bending cult

classic, kick-starting a breadcrumbchasing mystery hunt leading straight to the doorstep of a sequel announcement. The Steam forums noticed, obviously, and set about dissecting every new audio file, dialling into BBS boards and phoning up Gabe Newell's mum. They'd pretty much cracked it within 24 hours.

HOLE IN THE SKY

Watching that mystery unfold was entertaining enough, but what of Portal itself? Is the update - an achievement requiring you to find 26 radios dotted about the levels, and bring them to a location, guided only by static audio, to tune into some morse code - an interesting addition in itself? Or is it essentially just a carrier for an





"Forces you to rethink the basics of the FPS genre"

89% - Steve Hogarty, PC ZONE #187

interesting press release? Should you actually bother going back to do all this stuff, now that the enigma's been drained away?

Well, this is no lazy update. Each radio is very deliberately placed, either in plain sight or obscured by test chamber furniture. In the latter case, you'll have to listen out for the jazzy reprise of Still Alive, tracking it carefully in stereo as you gently spin around the test chamber like an echolocating dolphin or personsized bat. GlaDOS does not afford you the simple luxury of an ear-trumpet.

Once you've found the radio you need to take it to an unmarked location inside (or later on, often outside) the chamber. This is the most difficult part of the job, as your aural compass - a static noise as you approach the required location - only comes into effect once you're relatively

close to your goal.

This is also the time when you'll appreciate just how finely honed Valve's otherwise meticulous design process is, by virtue of this achievement not having had the typical Valve sheen applied to it. Signal locations are often cruelly placed in odd locations, serving only to frustrate as you blunder backwards through levels in search of that static buzz.

CLEVER GIRL

What's far more important than a few errant hotspots is the broader nature of this update, a sequel announcement delivered via the original game. Seeing all of Valve's systems come together to serve as an announcement vehicle shows a frightening degree of co-ordination, and hints at a fascinating new means of interacting with a captive audience.

At no other time could this have been done: it needed a single platform to which Valve could deliver an update that would be applied simultaneously to all of the game's users, it needed an achievement engine to drive players towards solving the riddle, and it needed a forum to allow a thousand people to write a million words about exactly what the hell was going on.

Two days later, another update: "Added valuable asset retrieval." With this Valve change the game's epilogue, effectively placing a question mark after "The Fnd"

With that, Valve have announced Portal 2 (page 46), stoked their gaming community into a state of hysteria, and they've got everybody chasing stale cake again. Genius. PEZ

VERDICT

A seguel announcement that shames any PR and marketing team's efforts, and leaves the original game better off for it. Go back and play Portal now. Steve Hogarty



The little acorn from which Portal grew is the foreverlauded game Narbacular Drop by Nuclear Monkey.

2006

When Valve like something, they barge in and take it. The Narbacular Drop team are scooped up and put to work on Portal



Portal is out, and doesn't receive a great deal of updates. Probably due to its size and single-playeriness.



1 MARCH, 2010

A sudden update added the unusual radio-grabbing achievement, to the delight of many obsessives.



3 MARCH, 2010

Update "Added valuable asset retrieval", changing the ending to allow for the announcement of a sequel..



11 MARCH, 2010

Valve's Gabe Newell gets the Pioneer Award at GDC. A fake BSOD drops yet more Portal 2 hints.

Budget

Showing signs of age? Dropping your prices? Jon 'Log' Blyth is interested...

HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC V

T'S STRANGE TO think that Heroes of Might & Magic V came out just four years ago. The Might & Magic brand has been around for 24 years, and despite reinventing itself every now and then - Dark Messiah was an enjoyable distraction, for starters - the brand still feels slightly tainted by the dusty associations of old-school fantasy role-playing.

We didn't rate it so highly at launch, but the fifth edition of the real-time strategy arm of M&M ages surprisingly well. Perhaps it's because the bugs have been patched. Perhaps it's because the budget price lowers your expectations. Perhaps it's just a plain trick of the

mind - but with a pinch of nostalgia and such a minimal cash outlay, **HOMMV** becomes a pleasure to re-explore.

As you'd expect from a mature universe, the game is set in a wellimagined and detailed fantasy world, that has six factions: the decent and corrupt wizards of Academy and Necropolis, high and dark elves from the Sylvan and Dungeon factions, with humans and demons taking their opposite places in the same way Human and Chaos do in Warhammer. (How vain are we, that wizards and elves can be pitted against evil versions of themselves. but humans need to cast themselves

against something dead poetic?)

Each faction plays differently enough to make their own campaigns interesting, and there are dozens of hours of satisfying Warcraftian strategy to be wrung from the single-player game.

On top of that, the game's looks and musical score have withstood the test of time. That is, if you can call four years any kind of a serious test of time. So, at its new extremely low price, the musically abbreviated Heroes of Might & Magic V gets a belated recommendation from ZONE





Steve had two fillings on the NHS. SAVING £850 on a full Ebert jaw

Log bought one can of Relentless and tipped it into 10 Red Bull shot bottles SAVING £18.31



Dave slammed his dick in a drawer instead of buying more crack. SAVING £1,500 on







PCZONE

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3 DELUXE

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

WHEN ARE THEY not re-releasing Tycoon games? Do they put the prices back up, every other month, just to drop them again, creating an exciting new presence on the budget scene?

I can see you looking sheepish, over there, Zoo Tycoon. Stop whimpering and show me your price tag. I knew it! You're budget, but I bet you'll be back on some



new release list in the next couple of months. Well don't come here for a review, or I'll take the piss out of vour zebras

Still, at least Rollercoaster Tycoon 3 is one of the good ones, and having the expansion packs included are a bonus. For the time, the ability to ride your coasters in full, breathtaking 3D was



something of a fun gimmick, even if you did have to simulate G-forces by playing the game in the back of a convertible BMW. And to this day, making a fairground that causes miniature people to become over-excited and vomit is its own reward.

This is damn good example of the overfilled Tycoon genre, so if you've somehow managed to get this far in life without buying it six

times at varying prices, you should probably buy it now.

EMPIRE EARTH III

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £9.99

WHEREAS GAMES LIKE Heroes of Might & Magic V have improved with time, Empire Earth has become less appealing. Where effort was made in fairly pointless touches, such as



buildings that collapse semi-believably, Mad Doc lobotomised the series.

We've nothing against streamlining, but technically the human body could be streamlined by removing the arms and



legs, and that's essentially what they've done here. Then they've thwacked the head with a frying pan, which has mucked up elementary RTS elements such as pathfinding.

Empire Earth III isn't abysmal, it's just a pale shadow of previous games if you're determined to dig around in

the past, go one step further and play the first two games. They're both available in the budget shelves as well.



AND THE REST...

Three dirt-cheap golden nuggets you should definitely own



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE -REDEMPTION

\$6 (£4), gog.com Debugged. Fantastic! Essential.



GABRIEL KNIGHT 2

\$6 (£4), gog.com This FMV point-and-click adventure puts similar efforts to shame.



CAESAR III

\$6 (£4), gog.com Engrossing and well-imagined empire-building and town management.



PCZNNE BUDGET GAMES



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

£10, White Label

The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the excellent mods.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: **OBLIVION GOTY**

£1499, Steam

The sequel to Morrowind features the massive open-world gameplay expected from Elder Scrolls games



COMPANY OF HEROES

£9.99, Steam

A challenging yet fun, WWII RTS that sees you playing Axis and Allies in the days after the D-Day offensive.



PSYCHONAUTS

£10 Steam

You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless Brütal Legend appears on the PC.



MASS EFFECT

£12.99. Steam

The definitive space opera RPG/ shooter. A must-play, especially before you start Mass Effect 2.

Buver's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5 **SHAMELESS CLEAVAGE**











PCZ TOP 5

ELDER SCROLLS: MORROWIND

MEDIEVAL:

TOTAL

WAR II

LEFT 4 DEAD

HALF-

2 AION

RUNESCAPE

1.4million

subscribers

LIFE 2

PCZ TOP 5

WORLD OF WARCRAFT 11.5million subscribers

3.5million subscribers

MOST POPULAR MMOS*

AND OBLIVION

CRAP MOD-SPAWNERS 1 UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

FPS



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%) 187 (82%)

170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingerious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may be remain so.

LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 - 93% The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims



TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 – 93% Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph. bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



LEFT 4 DEAD 2

PCZ Issue: 214 – 94% Basically, this is *Left 4 Dead* in the Deep South, Except this one has new modes, new Infected. new campaigns, as well as machettes and chainsaws for some serious slice and dicing. Better than the original.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 - 90% A triumph of non-linear A triumph of non-linear gameplay, Far Cry 2 offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well realized, you won't care. well-realised, you won't care



CALL OF DUTY: **MODERN WARFARE 2**

PCZ Issue: 215 - 94% Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's absolutely great shooter



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 – 96% Despite the recent sequel having better gameplay, *BioShock* is still the superior game. Enter a destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR PCZ Issue: 205 - 94%

PCZ ISSUE: 205 – 94% Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the *Total War* series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 939 With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions Opposing Fronts and Tales of Valor keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 – 92% A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92% A Buver's Guide without a Civ A Buyer's Guide without a Civ game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs Warlords and Beyond the Sword.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 - 91% This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity



MEDIEVAL II:

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91% A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88% Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%

We PC users have had to wait a while (OK - we had to we PC users have nat to wart a while UN – we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of GTA4 adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nighthware an American nightmare



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to centend with contend with



ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

PCZ Issue: 220 – 90% Travel around Venice and Italy, meet Da Vinci and make friends with some prostitutes, run along walls and kill lots of people. It's Assassin's Creed, but with all of the kinks smoothed out, and plenty of depth added.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90% Murder most foul, and you're the killer. Fahrenheit boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and



PSYCHONAUTS PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker detailed and off its rocker – Psychonauts is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89% We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue 213: 89% Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck, Arkham Asylum's mix of action, RPG and stealth-'em-up play makes it a near classic. The best *Batman* game we've ever seen.





MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT PCZ Issue: 152 - 95% Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth

Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 182 – 87% A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat, and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ON THE AGE OF RECKONING PCZ Issue: 200 – 92% Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into mporary group guests



GUILD WARS PCZ Issue: 156 - 94% How to make a gaming accessible to the masses accessible to the masses.

A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88% Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading

SIMULATION



PCZ Issue: 162 - 92% Finally, a space sim to better X2. Finally, a space sim to better X2. The Threat, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES PCZ Issue: 128 - 92% While flight sims are getting

rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



THE SIMS 3

PCZ Issue: 209 - 92% The Sims 3 is like having your The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur



MICROSOFT FLIGHT STMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 - 89% The latest (and maybe final) in the Flight Simulator series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING PCZ Issue: 213 – 90% Like its peer *Armh II*, *OpFlash 2*

aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

DRIVING/RACING



PC7 Issue: 173 - 92% Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2 PCZ Issue: 214 - 90%

The new rally game bearing the The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, that has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX PCZ Issue: 205 – 89% This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.



RACE DRIVER: GRID

PCZ Issue: 195 - 88% Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT

PCZ Issue: 213 - 84% The Need For Speed series gets series. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best NFS around.

ODDBALL



PC7 Issue: 199 - 95% This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should



WORLD OF GOO PCZ Issue 201 – 90%

PCZ ISSUE 201 – 90% A stroke of indie genius, World of Goo is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL

PCZ Issue: 187 - 89% Ingenious and absurdly funny, Portal is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88% The God game-like Garry's Mod gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BRAID

PCZ Issue: 209 - 90% PCZ ISSUE. 209 – 90% Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010 PCZ Issue: 214 – 88% Every year sees another Football

Manager appear to break up relationships across the country. But while FM2010's updates mean it still holds the top spot Champ Man is closing in



PRO EVOLUTION **SOCCER 2010** PCZ Issue: 214 - 85%

The football industry may ignore PES, but PES doesn't ignore PC users. This year's PES includes updates from the console release, something that FIFA 2010 can't claim



PCZ Issue: 214 - 90% PCZ Issue: 214 – 90% Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, NBA 2K10 proves it's the top of its league.



FOOTBALL MANAGER

PC7 Issue: 205 - 85% All the joy of Football Manager with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers and the world.



CHAMPTONSHIP

MANAGER 2010 PCZ Issue: 214 – 80% With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, *Champ Man 2010* has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match *FM2010*'s depth, it's far more accessible.

ROLE-PLAYING



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%

Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with our mum to enjoy RPGs



FALLOUT 3

PCZ Issue: 201 - 91% While it does play like *oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great openworld that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

PCZ Issue: 214 – 93% By delivering an RPG that's at once realistic, brutal, heroic, sexy and immersive. BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG genre. We're already eager to see what they'll do with *Dragon Age 2*.



MASS EFFECT 2 PCZ Issue: 218 – 93%

POZ ISSUE. 210 – 9,57% Darker in tone than the original, but featuring refined... well... everything, Mass Effect 2 is a near-perfect mix of third-person gunplay and RPG storytelling. Just make sure you play Mass Effect first.



DEUS EX

PCZ Issue: 93 - 94% This is the benchmark in RPGs -This is the benchmark in RPGs if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure Deus Ex remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

RICHARD'S PICK



THE WITCHER

PCZ Issue 188 – 88%
Being an old-time P&P RPGer – the kind which involves rolling funny shaped dice and talking to real-life people in person – I've always enjoyed CRPGS. But none have met my expectations since Baldur's Gate II. That is until The Witcher arrived.

CRPGS. But none have met my expectations since Baldur's Gate II. That is until The Witcher arrived. This game from then-unknown CD Projekt was plainly stunning: based on Andrzej Sapkowski's original reworkings of fairy tales and standard Tolkien tropes, this game featured intense tactical combat, drugs, sex, and — most importantly — a damn good story.

The Witcher's setting is a world where morality is a complex, shifting mass that lacks any clear definitions of good and evil. This is a world where an antilhero is the good guy by default. By forcing you to choose between taking the side of medieval Nazis, literally inhuman terrorists, or staying out of the conflict and allowing a civil war to break out. The Witcher forces you to consider your actions and their effects. And not just on the wider world — each choice you're offered has a personal consequence for you in the game: help a woman out early in the game, and you get an ally later on; choose the wrong lover, and you make an enemy.

And boy, were there a lot of women. In various states of nakedness. As well as threesomes with eager nurses. Yes, The Witcher is a truly great game.

DAVID'S PICK



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010

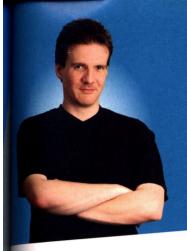
POOTBALL MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue 214 – 88%
While doubters would decry it as being merely a spreadsheet or, if they're being kind, an "animated spreadsheet", they're clearing missing the point of why these games are so compelling to play. If you think of it being like an RPG then perhaps you'll come closer to understanding it. And if you factor in the fact you rimagination has a lot to do with why you can enjoy something that, yes, does look like a swishier version of Excel. It's the emotional bond you form with your mental image of the players in your team that connects you to the game.
Like a good book, FM2010 goes beyond the mere dry presentation of facts and figures. Overanalyse the game and you miss the point, just like trying to interpret or explain why a classic book is saying what it says drains all the life from it. You might also want to think of it as a strategy game too, where your efforts are put into defeating an opponent using the information you have to hand.
Essentially, you've got the most comprehensive football database in the world, licensed by Premiership teams, coupled with an increasingly lush visual aspect that belies its spreadsheet origins, Yes, you're just watching a load of stick men running around on the screen, but if you break any game down to that level, they become absurd. It's a great game and there's reason why so many love it.

INCOMING!

Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 18 for the full run-down.



ISSUE 214 ON SALE NOW



lardware Better gaming through technology

HOW MUCH!?!

'VE RETURNED FROM a purveyor of well-known German automobiles and I've had to sit down. It wasn't the coffee, nor the besuited ape who spent several minutes summoning the energy to rise from his desk and greet me. No, it was the cost of satellite navigation.

There are plenty of arguments as to why you'd want Sat Nav as an option in your car, the most obvious and also the most compelling - being that it's always there. You don't have to remember it, it can't be stolen, and your wife can't go and lose it.

Seventeen hundred guid! The ape brushed some imaginary dirt from his lapel and explained that was the going rate for such a device, so I asked if he had a PC at home. He adopted a happy, faraway look, and then began rattling off tech specs as easily as the alphabet.

We played the nerd game for a bit, and I then made the point that the hardware in his PC made the hardware in this car (pointing) look like a train set. All that money yet the car's system still had a look and feel from the '90s, and its 30GB storage capacity was dwarfed by the Flash drive in my pocket.

Seventeen hundred quid? What for? The one my wife last had wasn't anywhere near as expensive, but it offered voice recognition and Bluetooth. Ah, replies the ape, forgot to say: Bluetooth is another £880.

I didn't buy the car. Though I did replace my missing TomTom.



Hardware editor

HARD WORDS BY JON 'LOG' BLYTH

HURT UNLOCKER

ASUS awakens dormant cores on AMD chips

HE NEW ASUS M4A89GTS Pro has a rather amazing feature: flick a switch and it turns your dual or triple-core AMD processor into a guad core processor.

Also available on all ASUS M4-series boards and on the company's other AMD 800 chipset products, Core Unlocker enables the BIOS to access additional processor cores on certain AM3 chips. Nothing is guaranteed in such matters, of course, but anyone with a dual core Phenom II - such as the bargain 550 Black Edition - would be mad not to see if their X2 has been hiding its X4 under a bushel.

On the M4A89, a pair of DIP switches on the edge of the board itself lock the cores in place. On other platforms, such as the M4A89GTD PRO and Crosshair III Formula, a quick BIOS update from the ASUS website prompts users to hold the number '4' during boot up, at which point Core Unlocker starts working its magic.

There are of course many reasons why you'd want four cores rather than two or three - the most obvious being multitasking performance. ASUS also

claim that by increasing the core count, users can also get more than 100% better overclocking performance as well

Spend £70 on a processor, get a



SERVICE PACK 147 Update for new Windows due soon

MICROSOFT HAS BEEN spilling the beans on Windows 7 Service Pack 1, due for download within the coming months.

The company explained that Service Pack 1 would be a comparatively small affair containing only minor patches, some of which users will have already received through automatic updates.



What it will deliver is an updated Remote Desktop that takes advantage of RemoteFX. This technology allows users to watch full-quality video and graphics over a network

It's really only a matter of time now before your home PG moves to the loft, or even to a secure, off-site location, and you play games remotely from anywhere in your home - or indeed anywhere in the world

microsoft.com/windows7

NEWS ROUND-UP

PANASONIC ARE BUNDLING their new TVs with NVIDIA's 3DTV Play software that enables PC games to be displayed in - you guessed it - 3D. Together with a HDMI 1.4-compatible 3D TV, you'll need a compatible GeForce card, some goofy-looking glasses and either *Windows Vista* or *7*. Not to mention some motion sickness tablets. nvidia.com

AFTER THE 2005 relaunch of the onceillustrious Commodore name in Europe, Commodore USA are launching an underwhelming C64 clone powered by last year's Intel hardware - the Phoenix. You can get details on this retro-looking all-in-one computer at the equally retrolooking Commodore USA website. Names from history should be left where they belong, otherwise it won't be long before marketing people revive all the old brands. commodoreusa.net

CFX: What you hear when you hold a shell up to your ear. QUAD CORE: A form of robust, off-road pornography that takes place at moderate speeds, yet still manages to cause the deaths of many British teenagers. FREQUENCY RESPONSE: In 1994, Michael Stipe asked: "What's the frequency, Kenneth?" The lack of a self-contained answer in the song lyrics led to furtive speculation, and we are still waiting Kenneth's official response. It's believed that the answer, when it comes, will be the location of a radio station that plays all thriller, no filler. FORCE WARE: A hooded cape.

Dear Wandy
If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't

working, don't panic...

PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing World of Warcraft so long your partner's left you? Wandy can't help with those setbacks, but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows all, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including details about your problem and system specs.



I've been looking to buy replacement speakers for my PC. I don't need more than two channels as past experience has shown it to be a needless mess of wires, and I've surround sound headphones set aside for that. (They do a better job anyway!)

I'd like to avoid a subwoofer if possible, as it's just another box taking up useful space, but a stereo headphone input is a must. I listen to music just as much as I play games, so I'm after a premium quality set and have set



All good things come in pairs.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAF	PHICS	
MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 10.1	27 Jan 10
NVIDIA	Force Ware 196.21	19 Jan 10

SOUN	ID .	
MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audiov Bota 218 0001	17 Jul 08

myself what I think is a reasonable budget of £250. Is there anything you can recommend?

Phil Dorney

For £250, the world is your oyster. I would start by checking out Logitech's £60 Z-10s, simply to challenge any belief that you need to throw money at this endeavour in order to get the best product - it's not necessarily true.

The Z-10s are small and elegant and don't have the clutter of a sub. They also have a 3.5mm headphones input and integrate with Windows media players to display track information. The audio quality is warm and rounded, though at just 15W they're never going to be room fillers.

I'd then check out the M-Audio's Studiophile AV 40s, the best sub-£100 speakers bar none, and then Acoustic Energy's Aego Ms, though these do use a sub to help them sound better than everything in their price bracket.

At the top of the shop, to my mind, there's only one choice: the £249 Audioengine 5. These will blow both your socks and your underpants into the next room, though I still question spending so much, when so much of your listening is apparently done wearing headphones.

CORE DUMPED? My current system is nearly four years old, though I did spend £600 on upgrades a while back. It features

Intel's Q6600 processor, 3GB RAM. 250GB hard drive, 750W power supply unit and two 8800GTs, all held together by an ASUS P5N-E SLI motherboard. I'm currently using Vista.

I'm looking for advice as I'm saving up over the next few months to improve my system - though I'm not sure if a new PC would be more cost and performance effective. The system is currently holding its own, but as newer PC games arrive it'll probably feel the strain.

I don't have a specific cost ceiling in mind, but certainly no more than £1,000. I note any upgrade would require a new

motherboard, and I'd rather have one very good graphics card rather than two in SLI. Any potential new system should only include the base unit, as I already have a monitor.

Cheap ves

slow no

Can you please let me know if a new system or an upgrade is the best choice, and also if upgrading to Windows 7 is also recommended?

Adie Dewsbury

In all honesty, the setup you have now is a fine, solid, middle-of-the-road PC. By that I don't mean that it's mediocre, just that I recognise it as a configuration that would've felt close to untouchable when new, and even today will be more than capable of dealing with almost

JITSU COMPUTER SIEMENS	MADE IN CHINA 中国制造
SIEN LF EL机井: HP-Q2767F3P LF	POWER IS 280W
X CONTINUOUS C连续输出功率280瓦 C连续输出功率280瓦 SV AND +3.3V COMBINE SV 和+3.3V 的总输出功率7	POWER IS 280W DOUTPUT POWER SHALL NOT EXCEED 110W BUILD OUTPUT 主直流輸出 MAIN OUTPUT 主直流輸出 MAIN OUTPUT +5V 14.5A MAX, MAIN 13A MAX, +12V2 14A MAX,
5V MI Y MAN	+3.3V 15A MAX, +12V2 +12V1 0.8A MAX
100V-12/V~ 4A	AUX OUTPUT 辅助加加 +5V 2A MAX
50-60Hz	
S/N: 流水号:	00001531 The Ronnie Corbett of power supplies.

dear wandy, pc zone, future publishing, @ 2 balcombe st. london, nwl 6nw

"A PC that's clean of malware and behind a modern router isn't going to be taken over by hackers"

anything you throw at it. You said as much in your letter.

What it isn't is very expandable. That ASUS motherboard isn't going to support recent Core 2 speedsters, such as the Q9650, and if you do decide to stick with an old nForce platform, you'll be forever missing out on newer, better hardware such as the Core i5 750. This is a processor which is not only a match for the Q9650 in terms of benchmark results, but is also a good £100 cheaper. Everyone has a soft spot for Core 2, but there's no getting around the fact it's getting long in tooth and short on breath particularly where cutting-edge gaming is concerned.

In your shoes, I'd probably spend £80 on ASRock's top value H55M-Pro. It's the cheapest H55-based mATX mobo available, but unless you know precisely why you might want to spend £200 or more on a willy-waver model instead, don't.

Next, get the retail box of Intel's i5 750 processor for around £150, being sure to avoid its pricier 'S' variant, and then spend £200 on Corsair's 4 x 2GB DDR3 1333MHz XMS3 kit. And today Windows 7 64-bit is a must.

Finally, treat yourself to a Radeon HD 5870 for around the £300 mark. and if you can, keep the 250GB drive for data and get Intel's 80GB X25-M solid state drive for your system and applications. Just make sure it's the second-generation model - it'll have 'G2' in the model number and cost in the region of £180.

As for the chassis, that's such a personal thing I couldn't possibly advise you, though my choice would be Supermicro's 731D-300B. Simple, handsome, with world-class build quality, it's a joy to work on.

MONKEY **BUSINESS**

I have a Fujitsu-Siemens E3510 PC with a Core 2 Duo E4600 processor, 2GB of DDR2 RAM, and a 500GB hard drive, all of which is running Vista Business. It's worked great as a work PC and also as a light gamer, its Intel GMA 3100 allowing me to play games like Sid Meier's Pirates! and Evil Genius with few problems. I've never pushed it to its limits but I'm guessing that running Empire: Total War or Mafia II at high detail levels will be beyond it.

The obvious solution would be to put a dedicated graphics card in, such as the Sapphire Radeon HD 5750 (or 5770) Vapor-X, something that would run quiet and allow me to continue using it as a work computer. However, on closer inspection there is no free six-pin - or indeed, any pin – power cable to feed a graphics card. I don't think it can take a larger PSU.

I save monkeys for a living *[regular*] readers will know this, and will have visited savetheorangutan.org.uk to offer their help. Haven't you? - Ed] which doesn't pay well, and so have around £200 to solve this problem. Can I make this PC run the likes of Mafia II at highish spec, or am I stuck with games dated before 2005?

Paul "Monkey Bloke" Johnson

The E3510 is a 'small form factor' PC. What this means is that while the motherboard has a PCI-Express x16 slot for you to add a discrete graphics card of your choosing, the fact your PSU has less than the requisite number of wires is the very least of your worries.

To start with, you're going to need a low-profile GeForce or Radeon card just to fit inside that slimline case.

ALL ABOUT...

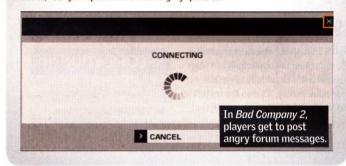
26 CANNOT CONNECT TO EA ONLINE

A revolutionary new multiplayer game engine, developed by a team of monkeys and used in the Battlefield series, is taking the online community by storm.

First used by DICE in Battlefield: Bad Company 2, the Cannot Connect to EA Online engine gives tens of thousands of players single-click access to other games they've paid good money for and which actually work, except for Bad Company 2. A new set of open communication protocols – dubbed notworking – allow gamers to login at any time and from anywhere and always achieve the same result.

In addition, the engine provides a strikingly accurate simulation of every other Battlefield release from the last six years, the stark message box and 'Cancel' button reminiscent of that dismally chaotic, predictably disorganised world where nothing works and everyone wonders what'll happen a short time from now when two more cash-in titles have been released and nobody can be bothered supporting the old ones.

Anders Server-Outage, lead developer of the Cannot Connect to EA Online team, told us, "Can you repeat that? I'm driving my sports car."



The fastest 'half-height' card on sale today is AMD's £70 HD 5570, but while this should prove noticeably faster than any onboard solution, it's still a way behind the comparatively dreamy performance offered by its bigger brothers. In titles such as Mafia II (which won't be out for some time) I'd expect the 5570 to turn out frame rates roughly on a par with the 9600 GT from two years ago, and you'd still need to keep most settings low to enjoy the game. ~

The power supply is another problem entirely. While you could replace it, finding a new CFX unit for your case - one rated at 450W or better, with the amps in the right places and with two PCI Express

connectors - would be an impossibility. Even if such a beast existed, vou'll never escape the fact that you'll be cramming a hot video card fed by a hot power supply into a tiny case with probably less than 15 litres of air inside it. In short, everything's going to cook.

Having said all that, the Radeon HD 5570 will at least allow you to play the modern games you want to play, albeit without the elaborate levels of detail you were probably hoping for. In addition, you won't need to change your supply, and you can put the remaining £130 from your budget towards your next PC. Because once you've fitted that new card, there's nothing more you can do.

"Finding a new CFX unit for your case would be an impossibility"



(8bit) I've heard hackers can gain access to your PC by scanning for unprotected ports on your PC but I don't get how. (Tetras) Ports are how programs communicate over networks, so if your PC is listening on a particular port, it could receive stuff. Without a way of exploiting that access there isn't anything that can happen. (Wandy) Tetras is right. A PC that's clean of malware and behind a modern router isn't going to be taken over by hackers. Problems arise when your PC listens on ports (like when you host a game server) in which case a hacker could exploit vulnerabilities in the server's code. Visit www.grc.com and run ShieldsUp! to see what vulnerabilities exist. My guess is none

HARDWAREREVIEWS

WE ARE PC DETECTIVES

When we test PCs we look for the following things: SPEED: We use benchmarking software on all desktop systems to see how fast they'll perform in real-world situations. The better the performance, the higher the score. COST: A PC that performs as just well as a model that costs twice as much, is going to score highly. INSIDES: We check that wires and cables have been tucked away neatly, everything is plugged in correctly, and that the case and cooling system aren't going to fall apart if you sneeze near them.

YOYOTECH FI7EPOWER **MI K3**

PRICE £5,500 MANUFACTURER YoYoTech WEBSITE yoyotech.co.uk

THIS IS EASILY the most expensive PC we've had the opportunity to play around with. Thankfully, given the incredible outlay, it's also the fastest. But is the MLK3 PC really worth that much money?

If you're asking that question, then you can't afford the MLK3. But if you're a fairly clued-up member of the PC community this machine isn't for you either. This is a rich kid's technological check list. Top-end CPU? Tick. Ludicrous amounts of high-speed RAM? Tick. Multiple DirectX 11 graphics cards? Tick. Loads of storage? Tick. Multiple SSDs in RAID? Tick. So you won't be surprised to hear the MLK3 is nothing like value for money.

While this PC will be lightning fast in six month's time, and its Bloomfield chipset means it'll accept six-core Gulftown processors, you don't need to spend £5,500 to get this performance. Especially if you're looking at this

BENCHMARKS

MAX WRITE	169MBps
MAX READ	555MBps
SSD PERFORMANCE	
[‡] DirectX 10 test [†] DirectX 11 test	
WORLD IN CONFLICT	72
DIRT 2 [†]	68
FAR CRY 2 [‡]	84
GPU PERFORMANCE fps @	1680 x 1050

SPECIFICATION

CPU	Core i7 975 3.33GHz @ 4.14GHz
MOTHERBOARD	ASUS P6TD Deluxe
MEMORY	12GB G-Skill DDR3 2133MHz @ 1,866MHz
GRAPHICS	ATI HD 5870 2x
STORAGE	2x 80GB SSD, 2TB HDD
0S	Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit

machine from a gaming perspective. Today's latest games run brilliantly on old graphics cards because of their console origins, so you're not getting five times the performance of a £1,000 ria here.

Similarly the Core i7 975 Extreme is the fastest CPU available, and it's overclocked to 4.14GHz. But they'd be little difference in the real-world to using a Lynnfield Core i7 870 - a chip that's half the price.

The Fi7epower

does resemble

a baby Cylon.

That said, the performance from the dual Intel X25 SSDs set in RAID is jawdropping: read speeds are well over 500MBps and 4K writes at 131MBps. Sadly, the time needed for the rig to go through POST checks and the RAID config, means boot times aren't cut.

basic components, so the PSU, storage drives and chipset never interfere with each other, means you can more efficiently control the cooling process.

That said, a £500 chassis should have far superior build quality to this. The boxes that house the PSU and optical drives feel flimsy, and there's far more movement in them when they're locked in place than there should be. And the designers should have come up with a more elegant solution to the optical drive caddy scratching the case's matte black surface, than a couple of bits of black insulation tape.

Knowing something about PCs' and components' relative performances, we could put together a machine for half the price with the same benchmarks as this. But that would require effort and this machine asks for none. DJ



"There's nothing you could do with

this PC that you couldn't do with one that costs half the price"

The reason for this is that the MLK3's two HD 5870s can trash any gaming benchmark you put in front of them. These two cards cost £530, and they'll happily outperform the twin-GPU ATI Radeon HD 5970 (issue 218, 83%), which is the same price. They could be dropped in a sub-£1,000 PC with a suitable PSU, and you'd get nearly identical performance figures as with the Fi7epower.

Basically, there's nothing you could do with this PC that you couldn't do just as well with one that costs half the price. Owning it is like having a Lamborghini and being unable to ever take it above 70mph.

And like the Lamborghini, the MLK3's BMW-designed chassis does look all kinds of funky. The case may cost over £500, but it does some interesting things. Separating out all the PRICE £140 MANUFACTURER Sennheiser WERSTTE sennheiser could

WIRELESS CANS BROADCAST

using FM, which has a much lower resolution than CDs and is affected by background interference.

These wireless headphones from Sennheiser transmit audio at CD quality (44.1kHz, 16-bit). The difference is dramatic: crystal-clear sound without the slightest hint of hissing and pulsing.



RANGE	20m
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	18Hz-21,000Hz
OPERATING TIME	24hr
POWER (HEADPHONES)	2x NiMH-Akkus (AAA)
POWER (TRANSMITTER)	5V DC or 2x Alkali-Akkus (AA)



The headphones are also superbly comfortable even during long listening sessions. But we're not fans of the integrated volume controls -they're a little bit fiddly, especially for larger fingers - and they're also a bit lacking in bass.

The RS 160s are very good, but if you're already looking at premium

headphones, get the RS 170. They've got more bass, volume. quadruple the range, and a smart docking station. GM





ALBATRON OTM

PRICE £250 MANUFACTURER Albatron WEBSITE albatron.com.tw

ALBATRON'S OPTICAL TOUCH

Monitor uses infrared light, optical sensors and reflective bars in its frame to track fingers, instead of a touch-sensitive screen. This only adds a small premium to the price of the actual monitor.

SPECIFICATION

TYPE	Active matrix TF
SIZE	21.5in
NATIVE RESOLUTION	1920 x 1080
RESPONSE RATE	5ms

We tested the screen using Touch Pack for Windows 7. The monitor and software proved responsive and tactile, which is all you can ask. But without the pack, icons and navigation buttons are too small to cope with fingers, and only Internet Explorer had any touchscreen features.

Really this monitor is a gimmick.

It'd be good if you hide the mouse and keyboard of a PC based in a kitchen, but on a desktop it's a waste. DJ





MIONIX NAOS 5000

PRICE £64.99 MANUFACTURER Mionix WEBSITE mionix.net

A NEW MOUSE always takes a bit of time to get used to, especially if you're fond of your current rodent.

So one of the most important things a pointing device needs to do is feel comfortable and not exhibit strange foibles that push you back towards your original clicker. The Naos 5000 does the latter.

SPECIFICATION

BUTTONS	7
RESOLUTION	5040dpi
WEIGHT	106g

Features-wise, it's flawless enough: it has configurable weights, huge DPI (one of three levels, that are selectable mid-game), and five main buttons and two side buttons to provide ample options for refined control - but it feels a bit strange.

Otherwise, there's nothing really to criticise - maybe with some more programmable buttons for MMO

obsessives - but other than that, it's as good a mouse as you'll find. But not one that'll suit everyone. DB



IIYAMA **PROLITE**

PRICE £235 MANUFACTURER Iiyama WEBSITE iiyama.co.uk

THIS IS A TN LCD, but superior to those of past years: colours have more range and saturation, and contrast and black levels aren't diluted greys. Yet it still falls short of IPS and PVA screens.

SPECIFICATION

SIZE	27in
ASPECT	16:10
NATIVE RESOLUTION	1920 x 1080
RESPONSE	2ms

Colours invert when the panel is viewed from above horizontal and can be inaccurate, as this panel can't render many, pixels jump constantly between two hues to replicate a third. And while the blacks are better than older TV panels', they're far from inky.

Inputs are limited to a DVI and a VGA port. The chassis is a cheap and hollow-feeling affair, and the tiltonly stand is flimsy. Not a good pick. JL





Where is it? Where's my iPod charger? Oh here it is. Let me just plug this in next to my mother-in-law's bed, where she is asleep. Oh no, I've accidentally plugged in this life-sized lap-dancer USB desk toy. It's gyrating in front of my now-awake mother-in-law's face. Whoops.

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear - both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ASUS RADEON HD 5970

PRICE £499 uk.asus.com

The Radeon HD 5970 is the world's fastest video card, making it an obvious choice for our top slot. Under that ugly plastic shroud are twin AMD RV870 chips, whose 4.3 billion transistors and 3,200 shader processors knock the GeForce GTX 295 out of the stadium and into the parking lot. Despite all this power it's not even particularly noisy when under load. If you have one of these cards you'll need at





INTEL **CORE I7 975** PRICE £770

The most extreme, most unlocked edition of Intel's guad core, multithreading flagship processor laughs at all modern games. The only reason not to get one is the imminent Core i7 980X, which will have six Hyper-Threading cores and 12MB Smart Cache and be even more jaw-droppingly stunning.



AUZENTECH X-FI FORTE 7.1 PRICE £119 auzentech.com

There was a time when you couldn't build a PC without a Sound Blaster. Today it's all handled by mobos and only fruitcakes buy discrete hardware. Oh really? The Forte is mad for games like nothing else: Dolby Digital Live, DTS Connect, even headphone and mic amps. Proper stuff.



LP2475W PRICE £450 hncouk

You can buy a 24in widescreen monitor for £150 these days. So why would you want this one? Simple: professional H-IPS screen technology, two DVI-I ports, DisplayPort, HDMI, six USB ports, height adjust, rotate, swivel and tilt, plus 1920 x 1200 pixels to stare at. Why not buy two?



WESTERN **DIGITAL** CAVIAR BLACK 2TB PRICE £220 westerndigital.com

Forget solid state for a moment: we're after a data tanker that'll swallow music, movies and your Steam folder. For thatthere's only one choice: the WD2001FASS. Don't be fooled into thinking that large drives are slower than smaller ones. This 2TB model is top of the HDD benchmarks.



RAMPAGE II **EXTREME** PRICE £259 uk.asus.com

ASUS claim the Rampage II Extreme is the "ultimate overclocking board", and looking at the design and specification it's hard to find a more attention-grabbing mobo. It has a massive array of tweaking tools, and you get a SupremeFX daughterboard with a X-Fi processor thrown in.



LOGITECH 7-5500 PRICE £249 logitech.co.uk

We've been advocating Logitech's THX flagship since it was launched in 2005, and although the silver plastic does tend to make it look a little dated alongside new rivals, the simple fact is that great sound never goes out of fashion. Nothing rivals the Z-5500s at this price.

SKINT?

SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 5750 VAPOR-X

PRICE £115

sapphiretech.com

While you could save yourself the cost of a game and buy NVIDIA's GTS 250, Sapphire's HD 5750 is faster, almost silent (courtesy of Vapor-X tech) and brings cool technology within reach of most gamers. Features such as DX11 support, ATI Eyefinity and DisplayPort connectivity simply aren't available on any GeForce. And thanks to CrossFire. the upgrade path is obvious: buy the







AMD PHENOM II X4 955 BLACK PRICE £122 amd.com

With the faster 965 Black at £139 and Core i5-750 at £152, spending that extra £30 on Intel's little belter will sure put a wider grin on your face. But when £30 $\,$ could buy your hard drive or a set of speakers, and you're on a tight budget, it has to be the Phenom.



IIYAMA PROLITE E2208HDS-2 PRICE £134 iiyama.co.uk

Cheap and unknown brands are often tempting, but many are based around yesterday's technology and won't support connections more exotic than a 15-pin analogue VGA. Which is why we'd go for this 22in Iiyama, with DVI-D, full HD resolution and integrated speakers.



GIGABYTE GA-MA770-UD3 PRICE £49 gigabyte.com.tw

Available for less than £50, GIGABYTE's GA-MA770-UD3 supports AMD's most recent AM3 processors including the Athlon II and Phenom II X4, X3, and X2. and DDR3 RAM of up to 1,666MHz. It also features RAID and onboard eight-channel HD audio, but there's no CrossFire support.



NONE PRICE £0 N/A

If you're strapped for cash, the last thing you want to be wasting money on is a sound card. It's simply not necessary. Every mainstream motherboard on sale today offers multi channel audio, so hook up your speakers there instead. You'll never notice the difference.



SEAGATE BARRACUDA 500GB PRICE £33 seagate.com

Seagate's 12th generation ST3500418AS drive costs peanuts, but a decent capacity means it'll cater for most media collections and a nod to the enthusiast market means it'll turn out some of the best benchmarks going. There are good reasons why it's the world's most popular desktop drive.

SPEAKERS



LOGITECH X-210 PRICE £25 logitech.co.uk

Another win for Logitech, a brand people still associate with mice. The X-210s are great value, and despite looking and feeling every inch the £25 speaker set, deliver subassisted audio that transcends their budget status. At this price you might find classier speakers, but never a more classy sound.

GG?





PC GAMER PRESENTS: STARCRAFT II ON SALE NOW! PC GAMES MAGAZINE
PC GAMES MAGAZINE

Available online with free delivery. Google 'GamesRadar Shop' for details.





PCZONE freeplay

Mods, maps and free things!

LIFE OF GAMES

USED TO love football. talking about it all the time at a previous place of work. When you're surrounded by people who take an interest in something you like, it's natural that you invest more of your own time into that hobby than you otherwise would.

Now, I'm coming very close to actively disliking it. I won't get into why, but a substantial degree of blame has to go to my current existence, in which I spend all my time playing and writing about games. It comes back to environment: at Zone Towers, I've got very little contact with in-depth football discussion.

Games are a pervading influence in my life. I come to work, I play, talk and write about them. When I go home, I play, talk and, if deadlines are tight, write about them. My housemate plays, talks and writes about them, and my current circle of acquaintances... well, you get the picture. Environment is very important when it comes to what you fill your own time with.

Everyone goes through phases of interest too, such as getting into a TV series and eschewing other forms of entertainment in favour of that. Then you might discover the glory of the latest Slayer album and bang goes the TV watching. However, games have been, and always will be, a constant for me. Unless my arms fall off and they haven't invented telepathic control methods when it happens.

So, while my interest in football struggles for air in the vast ocean of bitterness, boredom and hatred of humanity that is my mind, I'll always be at my keyboard. (Or controller, if it's a basketball game).



Staff writer



A NEW CHAMPION

Is Crysis the game of choice for ambitious modders?

MOD FOR Crysis WEBSITE moddb.com/games/crysis/mods

OT LONG AGO, Half-Life and Unreal ruled the modding roost. Now it seems their days, while not coming to an end, are involving earlier bed times.

The cause of this seismic shift in the mod scene is Crysis and the myriad interesting mods now appearing for it; like the MechWarrior total conversion Living Legends (mechlivinglegends.net,

There are numerous reasons for this new-found interest in Crytek's game and its engine. First of all is that more people can actually run the damn thing. Crysis is no longer the game that's used by people the world over to measure the quality of their rig. The CryEngine still requires a monster to get the absolute best out of it, but the majority of serious gamers will be able to get it running well now.

Secondly, the quality of the visuals that the CryEngine can deliver are giving modders, tired with the relatively drab feel of Half-Life 2's Source engine and the Unreal Engine 3, a reason to experiment, in the certainty that they'll be getting a visually pleasing product that will catch the eye of browsers on sites like ModDB.

Think about it: you see a gorgeous Crysis screenshot and a old Half-Life 2 image of the same scene, you're going to gravitate towards the pretty one. And finally, times will always change and people will move on to bigger, if not necessarily better, things. Two examples of this shift are Jumper and the City (moddb.com/mods/jumper-and-the-city) and open Outcast (moddb.com/mods/ open-outcast), both of which show off the power of the CryEngine and its versatility, things previously hidden.

A quick glance at the list of mods out now, and those still to come, reveals a mouth-watering number of potential greats, especially The Crysis of Cthulhu (moddb.com/mods/the-crysis-ofcthulhu). The chance to see a game based on HP Lovecraft's works in the CryEngine is (suitably enough) mind blowing.

So things on the modding scene could be about to change. However, it's important to stress that Half-Life 2 and Unreal mods will continue to dominate, simply because everyone is already at ease with them. (The Unreal Engine being available for free isn't going to hurt its popularity either.) But perhaps the CryEngine's ascension is a sign of a chink in their hitherto impregnable armour.

We'll be keeping a watchful eye on the Crysis modding scene and let you know how it continues to develop.











SNIPPETS



DEAD AGAIN

snipurl.com/deadcity2 Got a good memory? Then you'll recall

us discussing a Left 4 Dead campaign called Dead City, many moons ago. Now it's been redone, tweaked and made available for L4D2, so obtain it from the link above now



PROJECT ORIGINS

social.bioware.com/page/da-patches Prep yourself for the Awakenings expansion by getting the latest patch for Dragon Age, which removes your ability to 'shatter' elite foes. Handily, it's on this



PLASTER CASTER

elecorn.com/caster3c Some people didn't like the original Caster game (like us). But if you did like the first episode, you'll be pleased to know all subsequent ones will be free. Kind-of-hurrah, we suppose.



BRUSH STROKES

This is the dawning of the Age of Curling...

WEBSITE games.blackish.at/ageofcurling

HERE ARE FEW sports that can be accurately simulated on the PC. Cricket, that's right out. Rugby can never be portrayed effectively on a computer, let alone things like darts. Football, that works, as does tennis. Yet nobody has ever decided to accurately simulate the world of curling. Until now that is.

Blackish Games have come out with the concept to end all concepts, a curling game in which you can manually brush the ice (yes!), assign spin or 'curl' (oh hell

yeah!), and even play against actual live human opponents (kill me, the excitement is just too great!).

There's a trial version of the game, but you could also spend the piffling sum of \$10 to acquire the full version, which gives you access to five unique venues and three distinct play modes (by distinct we in fact mean "the same, just against the computer or not".)

The game works like this: click and drag an arrow to see where your stone will go to when released. Aim for the big

coloured circles and get as close to the middle as you can.

If the dastardly AI - or Team Blue as it prefers to be known – manages to get some of its own stones in the way of yours, either smash them out of the way (while avoiding knocking yours out of the circles) or assign curl to your stones to avoid them.

The possibilities are endless and you'll have passers-by crowding around you, eager to muscle you off the mouse and get playing

themselves.

METAL HAMMER

Freshen up your *Mount&Blade* experience

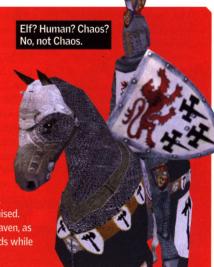
BLADES AND MOUNTS have been a part of PC gaming history for decades, but only Turkish studio TaleWorlds ever saw fit to jam both together to form one game. They've also got a very healthy attitude to their fans, letting them tinker with the beating ticker of their magnum opus, right down to the scary levels of doing stuff even the developers didn't know was possible, like a Warhammer mod.

Warsword is being made by an enterprising bunch who're aiming to recreate the world of Warhammer in Mount&Blade, with the customary insane level of detail you'd expect from a project like this. There's a guy who

specifically spends his entire time on the project modelling helmets. That's dedication to a cause, we think.

At the moment the devs are looking for more helpers, so the mod is in beta and available at the mbrepository.com should you wish to try it out. At the time of writing it includes six races - skaven, orcs, creatures of Chaos, the humans of the Empire, and dark and wood elves - although more are promised.

Personally, we're putting all our time into the skaven, as we've fond memories of killing the whiskery bastards while playing Advanced Hero Quest.



DOES NOT COMPUTE...



Step into the shoes of a Combine grunt in Human Error

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/half-life-2-short-stories

ASKING THE QUESTION of what it would be like to be a Combine soldier, one curiously called Anders in a little Scandinavian twist, Human Error pits you against the remnants of the Xenian army, which is in disarray following the death of the Nihilanth way back in the original Half-Life.

If you understood all that, you're fully prepared to embark on your journey. If you didn't, you'd better bone up on your Half-Life 2 knowledge before installing this mod. It'll be worth it in the long run.

Anders is a member of the Civil Protection unit, an arm of the Overwatch that crushes the hopes of humanity in places like City 17. Your job is to stop the enslaved Xenians fleeing the Earth, and their masters in the Overwatch, using an array of new abilities and machinery, like controllable manhacks and an APC.

There's a surprisingly cool bit in Human Error when you see Anders preparing for duty, putting on a Combine hockey mask, but in general you've got your usual Half-Life gameplay, although to describe the mod like that is doing it





"Accept that you really should have a look at *Humon Error*"

an serious injustice. There's a lot more to Human Error than simply some new levels, especially with the availability of some romp-tastic vehicles and new weird creatures to shoot. You can even look at



one of your Combine colleagues brushing his teeth.

Controlling the manhacks is the best bit though. A nifty little gadget allows you to pilot the whirligigs of death, which is something we're sure you've wanted to do for years now.

Doing things with the Source engine isn't new, but giving people more than the usual *Half-Life 2* mannerisms needs to be praised. So accept that you really should have a look at Human Error, and, perhaps, its cousin, Paradigm Decay, when it surfaces.

SNIPPETS



ONE-BUTTON STRATEGY

snipurl.com/paxbritanni Keyboard-sharing is all the rage at PC ZONE, so we adore games that let four play on one keyboard, Playing Pax Britannica only requires one button, so get your index finger warmed up.



HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

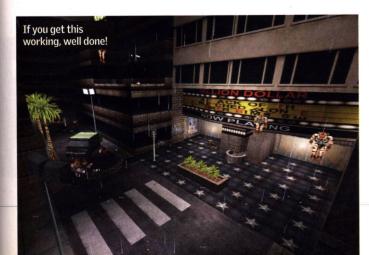
demruth.com/hazard.htm Hazard: The Journey of Life - a standalone *UT3* mod – is said to have puzzles that 'bend your mind'. It's been winning prizes and plaudits, so give the standalone demo a try.



ETERNAL DAMNATION

It might not be Forever, but it is Eternity

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/duke-nukem-eternity



USING THIS MOD gets a little complicated, and we aren't entirely sure we understand what's going on. Here's what we know: Duke Nukem Eternity is, according to ModDB, a "Polymer-only Episode for EDuke32 with Dukeplus."

Basically, it's the first episode of a mod for a mod for a Source engine port. EDuke32 is the port - an attempt to take Duke Nukem 3D out of DOS and into Windows, Linux and OSX too. DukePlus is a "game-enhancer and customiser" mod for EDuke32.

Once you've digested that, perhaps you might start worrying about how you're going to get it all working. According to the documentation provided, you'll need all the stuff mentioned above and also the Duke Nukem High Resolution Pack Dukeplus 2.07 or higher. Did we mention that before? Crikey, it's just getting too complicated round here.

UEMOS I ON THE DVD



Jon 'Log' Blyth is this month's DVD tour guide...



SUPREME COMMANDER 2

When it all kicks off,

war is totally pretty.

Big robots, relatively tiny men, great demo

WEBSITE supremecommander2.com



However, the thing you'll enjoy most about this demo are the abysmal cutscenes. Remember the opening to Section 8? Where the hard-nut fighty man thinks about birthday cakes and puppy cuddles? Well, this sappy bastard phones his wife to tell her he misses her.

Get a grip, you ridiculous developer tarts - there's a time and a place for human emotion, and it's in Final Fantasy. We came here to rip shit up.

PROBLEM ZONE Trouble with your DVD? Help is at ha

- 1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
- 2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are
- 3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
- 4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVO. The PC_ZOVE discs have been tested and cortified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing, Ltd cannot accept any septiment proposability for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.



BIG FOREHEAD

with that forehead and eyebrow ensemble. Luckily, this is a game about robots, so there'll be no soppy shit.



SOPPY SHIT

One hit from a stray plane and you're hallucinating about your children? Grow a pair, soldier, otherwise this whole game will be a blurry kid telling you he loves you.

NOW THAT'S A BAD CUTSCENE



ALRIGHTY THEN

Cut to something else entirely. No interaction, no relevance. Come on, Gas Powered Game, you could at least make this weak shit funny! You know, like *C&C* used to.



WHINY SOLDIER

"Get me a channel," says Bigface. "I want to tell my wife I love her. I get so emotional after these training missions. Will someone please kiss my enormous brow?"

FLOTILLA I'd give it 10 minutes if I were you WEBSITE blendogames.com/flotilla

THIS IS A 3-D 'simulturneous' strategy game. I've just invented that word. It means "turn-based, but both players turns are executed at the same time."

So, as you manoeuvre your ships to fire on the weakest parts of your



enemy's craft, don't be surprised if they're not where you thought

they were.
With its retro-simple design and beautifully daft log entries. Flotilla takes its wire-frame gameplay seriously, while still managing to

squeeze in spaceships manned by felines, hicken space pirates, toucan stowaways and cursed tattoos getting burned onto your chest while you sleep.

All of this stuff has no effect on the game itself, but it definitely makes you want to gaymarry the developers.



CH-CH-CHOICES

After the first level you get a

branch, allowing you to choose

the difficulty. Easy gives you a

Hard pits you against a bunch of

mindless, relentless wyrms. You

will learn to hate these wyrms.

battle against another ship.

We've turned into the **C&C Music Factory this** month – only instead of music, it's demos.



RED ALERT

commandandconquer.com/classic

Who hasn't got something to say about C&C's action-packed parallel franchise? Certainly we've got minty bagfuls to spew off about it! Just not now.



TIBERIAN DAWN

commandandconquer.com/classic The GDI missions and the NOD missions are on opposite sides of the disc. It had to be that way. They hate each other.



FEAR: SINGLEPLAYER

whatisfear.com

Sick of all the strategy? Well, here's a two-generation old shooter with that feisty wee nipper in her pre-sexual assault years



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS - AWAKENING

dragonage.bioware.com/awakening If you weren't satisfied with words about this Dragon Age DLC, look at these moving pictures instead.

HAMMERFIGHT Stop! Time for an MC Hammer joke

WEBSITE koshutin.com

CONTROLS DON'T GET much more simple than swinging your mouse, and things to swing don't get much more than hammers. So swinging hammers around with your mouse should be simple and satisfying.

But Hammerfight is the most mouse-crushingly frustrating game

we've played. It's hugely satisfying when you score a solid, full-pelt thwack on your enemy - but make one mistake in the single-player mode and there's not much hope of recovery.

Still, you can just plug four USB mice into your computer for melee. If you've got a desk the size of a beach.

1. SWORD

You'll first use the sword

are more difficult to spin.

3. MORNING STAR

You start off with the metal ball on the end of a chain. Some good thuds to be had here.

to attack bees. It's amazing how quickly you can die.

2. HAMMER

Hammers have a fixed distance, hit harder, but

CLOVER: A CURIOUS TALE

HARD

A 2D platformer that models its puzzles on the Dizzy series? That has to be worth checking out, especially with the charming modern graphics, and the relaxing ack of lives, energy bars, or continues





JUST CAUSE 2

Just how far can you parachute along an island? Just Cause 2 answers that: all the bloody way along, for as long as you want. It's also a game that asks the question: where will they put strippers next?



Freeware

Adam Glick never spends if he doesn't have to





This month's free gaming fun includes a romance over the original internet; challenging hedgerows leading to gags about trimming

bushes; messing around with physicsenabled letters; nuclear-powered steampunk dogfighting; and helping a famous sheep and his pals get home.

GLICK'S



TREME

DEVELOPER Jan Willem Nijman WEBSITE slordig.thepoppenkast.com

HOW CAN YOU ignore a game that has the name Extreme Gardening? You're right, it's impossible. Just as one cannot ignore the brilliance of Advanced Lawnmower Simulator, a virtual hedge clipping game holds an attraction that is difficult to fathom. Thankfully, this isn't taken seriously, unlike stuff like Crane Simulator. It's just all about snipping leaves off a bush to make it into a shape.

That's all there is to it, with more than 10 levels of leaf-related fun to cut your way through. The shapes you're asked to create are never outrageously difficult, but even just snipping them down to a passable imitation can be very challenging.

There are four grades of quality: fail, bronze, silver and gold. We never once got a gold, managing only a handful of silvers on the way to completing the game.

The challenge is there if you want to spend a long time perfecting your digital gardening skills, and even if you don't, you can still get a laugh in the office by saying you spent the whole of last night playing a game about topiary.



IGITAL: A LOVE STORY

Brdlbrdlbrdle shveeeee BADONG BADONG...

DEVELOPER Christine Love **WEBSITE** scoutshonour.com/digital

ELATIONSHIPS REQUIRE PATIENCE, a telephone line, a 3200 baud modem, numbers of several BBS sites, dialling software, and later on some codes to allow free long-distance calls.

In Digital: A Love Story you've been given a computer from the '80s (or you're living in the '80s, whatever's more likely) and just enough tools to access the information superbypass of the day: a crude, inefficient and backwards form of communication known as BBS

To a large extent, this is as much a game about nostalgia as it is about love. The low-resolution, scanline-straddled desktop, the primordial windows and chunky, pixellated screen-seven fonts, and the soothing chip music streaming from your anachronistic music player are all designed to wrench you back to a time before 32-bit colour and

megabytes, probably even a time before vou were born.

You start with a single local BBS number, which at first offers a list of publicly posted messages. You can hit the reply button next to any of these, which triggers an unseen, automatic response from the protagonist - you

girl to get her tits out over webcam besides, webcams haven't even been invented yet, so the best she could do would be a crude ASCII representation, and you can hardly knock one out over that) Digital: A Love Story begins to feel more like a failure-averse point-andclick adventure

"This is as much a game about nostalgia as it is about love"

might be arguing the merits of Shatner over Stewart, enquiring as to the availability of other BBS numbers, or even, once you begin to follow the plot's main thread, romancing an emotionally crooked poetess.

The joy is in the unfolding plot, and with little to actually get wrong (with no control over how you reply, there's little chance of getting pissed and asking this

Hammer the reply button along enough BBS messages, repeatedly type a string of numbers into the modem dialler, amass enough long-distance call card codes by returning to the shady bloke from the hackers' BBS, and eventually you'll come out the other end of this wonderful little pre-Pentium love tale. A linear, but defiantly enthralling indie title

STEAMBIRDS

Take turns taking to the skies

DEVELOPER Andy Moore, Dan Cook **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/steambirds

NOW THIS IS more like it. A topdown dogfighting game with a turnbased tactical bent, SteamBirds takes you from the earliest days of

flight combat right up until the fictional end of World War II in 1950.

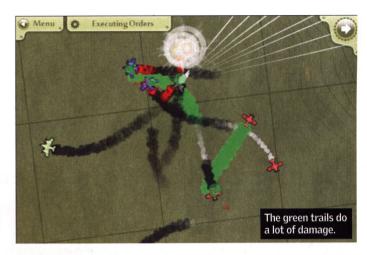
The premise is simple - destroy your opponents before they destroy your squadron, with stars awarded for the skill shown in victory. Scrape a win with one of your wings hanging off and is near impossible. your flight crew spilling blood all over the cockpit and you'll only get one star, while avoiding all damage gives you the maximum of four.

Your planes always travel along a path that you lay out for your plans, during the planning phase. What you'll always be aiming for is to get

your plane behind the tail of the opposition, allowing you to nail him with gunfire until he dies. What you don't want is that to happen to you. To help you, there

are a couple of recharging special moves you can utilise at key moments, such as a speed boost or the ability to turn on the spot.

This game is very difficult, certainly if you want to score the maximum four



stars on each level. There are 16 missions in all and even by the fifth one, you'll be having a lot of trouble getting a full award of stars. Simple it might be, but it also has depth in spades.

If you're an obsessive, SteamBirds will have you tearing your hair out in frustration as you try to avoid getting

your paintwork scratched by the flocks of enemy aircraft.

This is an excellent game and one that you could easily return to time and time again. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an appointment with some squadrons of dastardly Jerries. And don't forget the bonus levels too!

PROSE AND MOTION

Physics and spelling together at last

Getting four stars

DEVELOPER Deeper Beige **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/proseandmotion

A MASTERY OF words can open doors to the most sophisticated parts of this world, so any game that lets you practice manipulating them without boring you to death is a winner in our book.

This lexicographical light charges you with making a word out of the letters placed in front of you in order to progress to the next conundrum.

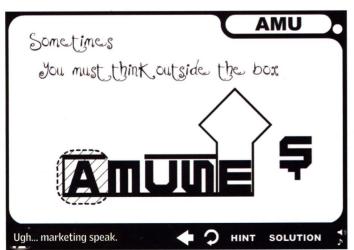
The game's also a physics-based puzzler as well, with a slightly awkward pick up-and-place mechanism for

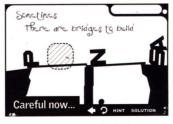
moving letters about. It's fiddly in that when you pick up a letter, gravity will act on it, making it twist around into an annoying position. Lots of tiny taps and touches are often required to get those letters in the right place – especially on the later levels when it's not as simple as placing them all on a single flat surface.

There are many ways through each level, but only one perfect way. Text on screen gives you a clue as to what word might be the correct one, although any

anagram will allow you to progress. Some letters can be flipped to make new words - like E, which can become an M or a W depending on how it flips. This adds an extra level of challenge to discovering the perfect word and there are a lot of levels to progress through before you hit the end.

This game is for those who spend time on trains filling in crossword puzzles. But if your knowledge of the dictionary extends to looking up 'cock', 'tit' and 'bum' you're out of luck.







WEBGAME



HOME SHEEP HOME

DEVELOPER Aardman Studios WEBSITE snipurl.com/homesheephome

THIS CHARMING LEMMINGS-a-like has you guiding Wallace and Gromitt's ovine friend Shaun and his mates across 15 hazard-strewn levels, so they can get back home and indulge in a bit of lunch. You control the merry flock of sheep using the arrow keys, using physics objects to create new paths to the escape point, and your allies as platforms to leap off should

Each sheep is of a different size, which comes into play during some of the later levels. Shaun's the useful one, because he combines the best of all worlds: speed, agility and strength. It's simple stuff, but we can't resist anything as cute as Aardman's sheep.

EXTEND ON THE DVD





David Brown delivers some choice mods and maps

DUNE WARS

Find 'grass_texture.bmp', replace with 'sand_texture.bmp'

MOD FOR Civilisation IV: Beyond the Sword WEBSITE moddly com/mods/dune-wars







HILE WE DO like Civ mods that deal with historical Mediterranean settings, they can all blend into one after a while. Once you've clapped eyes on one perennially popular scenario, you've clapped eyes on 'em all. So it's great that some mod teams are going further, choosing to stand out from the Peloponnesian crowd. We've discussed a few in these pages, but we've never been as impressed or intrigued as we are by Dune Wars.

There's some text missing to do with new technologies, which would make it easier for newcomers to know what was going on. But we guess the point of this mod isn't to educate those who are unaware of Frank Herbert's highly detailed Dune universe. Instead, it's taken for granted that you know about

the Harkonnen, the Fremen, Arrakis, melange and Kyle MacLachlan. If you don't, suffice it to say you're on a desert world and you have to do what you must to survive

As this is a Civ mod, the mechanics, however different the names are, are

with loads of strange words and names floating about the place.

Once you're in you'll be given the chance to choose from one of the factions present in the Dune universe, such as the different Houses, like the Harkonnen and Atreides, and other,

"It's taken for granted that you know about Harkonnen, Arrakis, melange and Kyle MacLachlan"

the same as you'll have become used to over the years: build Settlers and form new cities, locate and harvest resources, trade with neighbours, get angry with them for trying to bully you all the time, and that sort of thing. This is Civ as you've always known it, just

stranger parties like the technology obsessed Ixians.

Accompanying all these are pictures from the films and other entries in the Dune franchise (and a few that aren't), which gives you an idea of the nature of the factions. For instance, Harkonnens

are ruthless and violent, so there's no point going down the pacifist route with them, as others will have bonuses to help them beat you.

When you're on the map, you'll be trying to exploit the sands and rugged terrain, avoiding sandworms, stopping smugglers raiding your territory, and figuring out how and where to expand. The icons might have changed, but the concepts are the same: water replaces wheat as the currency of growth, etc.

Dune Wars is a little fiddly to get going, giving us at least one error message on its first load, but after that it's stable enough.

Dune fans will absolutely love this mod, as will non-enthusiasts too. It's not necessarily the most innovative, but it's pretty much rock solid and a great blast for Civ fans.

VIETNAM MOD Don't wait for Call of Duty 7

MOD FOR Call of Duty: World at War WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/vietnam-mod

THAT A GAME partially based in the Pacific, like World at War, would spawn a number of mods based on the little scrap that took place in Vietnam is logical.

This one is probably the best of the lot, but you'll have a job finding anyone playing it. This appears to be one of those good mods that no-one seems to be taking any interest in.

Conceptually, it's all good - a relatively popular game modded into a very popular setting, with all the good stuff the original game brings

with it. Yes, you've got to deal with the frustrating *PunkBuster*, which kicked us off the server five times for no reason, but other than that, the maps are large and interesting. There's even a nod to the older maps from Modern Warfare, with some re-imagined homages being packed into Vietnam.

If there are people playing, this mod would be as decent as a regular COD multiplayer game, with the added mosquito bites of a new and exciting setting. That's if you can find players, of course.





DARTHMOD ULTIMATE COMMANDER

Bigger, badder, and better uniforms

MOD FOR Empire: Total War WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/darthmod-empire

THIS MOD ALLOWS you to play with a far higher number of units on screen at any one time. The normal unit size setting in this is akin to ultra in the vanilla game, so you can expect to see upwards of 200 to 300 men per unit. If your computer can handle it, you can expect to see some truly epic bloodbaths on the Empire battlefields. Crivens, as they might say somewhere in the world.

Some other changes include improved land, naval and campaign AIs, new campaign starting positions, and cosmetic changes like corrected uniforms (according to the mod's developer), new drum and fife music. and a huge number of smaller mods.

Ultimate Commander is a little fiddly to install and isn't the most stable of releases, but then the Total War series has never been modder-friendly. At least this uses an executable to install it, and has a large number of options.

Suffice it to say, this whopper is one Empire obsessives should get.

FREEZER BURN Take a trip to Canuteland

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead 2 WEBSITE snipurl.com/freezerburn

SO MODDERS HAVE moved onto things white, fluffy and soft, as far away from the honky tonk and bluegrass cocktail of the Left 4 Dead 2 campaigns as can be, taking the team on a slight detour to a facility that reminds us of John Carpenter's remake of *The Thing*. It's snow, of course. The cold stuff. Ol' freezy pops.

While Kurt Russell is nowhere to be seen, lots of Infected - including a new variety of 'white' tanks - have inhabited a rather cooler location than New Orleans – a frozen skyscraper in Winnipeg, Canada. Presumably there was a convention on

Flames could be better.

or something, otherwise how do you explain so many zombies being there? Well, enough reasoning, down to the killing. This is a fairly average campaign, though it has a couple of neat extras you don't see every day - one of which is spoken dialogue created by the dev team, with responses from the Survivors ripped from L4D2's sound archive.

While all that adds a nice little touch to the proceedings, there are a few bugs to contend with in terms of the general design. The lift in particular - both coming and going, as the campaign is designed à la Hard Rain - is very unstable, with the ceiling missing and Coach spawning miles away, and then mysteriously materialising back inside for no reason. It's a weird footnote to a decent, solid and snowbound campaign.

Freezer Burn's ending is tough too, and the devs could make the big red circles denying entry to the chopper a bit less obvious.

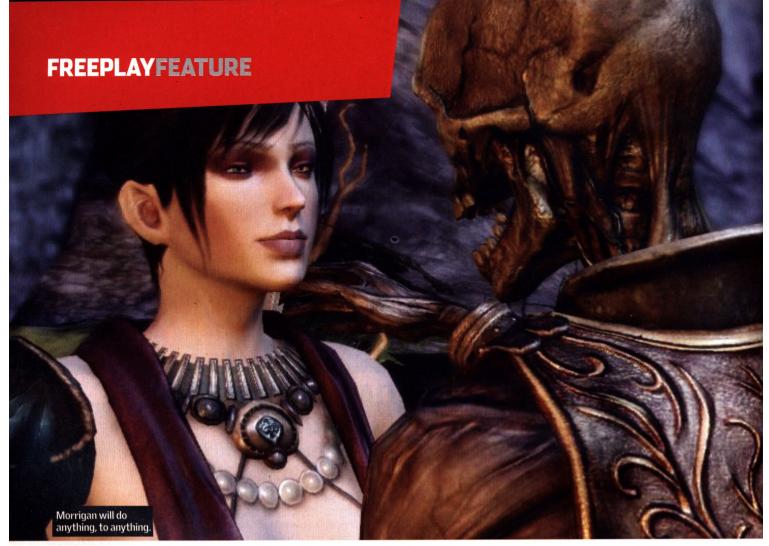






TUBI HATRED MOD FOR Max Payne 2 WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/tubi-

While the idea of killing Teletubbies is appealing, you might come away from Max Payne 2 angered, and perhaps tearful, that this atrocity has stained your hard drive and corrupted your installation files with its presence. Don't bother with it.



DRAGON AGE TOOLSET

Nick Brakespear bends over his tools, flaunting bum-cleavage and tutting

MOD FOR Dragon Age: Origins WEBSITE social.bioware.com/page/da-toolset

WO THINGS BECOME evident when delving into the arcane realms of toolsets and SDKs. Firstly, that with the vaguest of instructions and the most eccentric of software, fans can produce the most ingenious things. Secondly, these same modders will inevitably use this great talent to unleash the awesome power of breasts.

case, the honest search for mods that are in no way related to boobs, tits, cleavage, girl-on-girl or human-onbeast action is somewhat hampered by the deluge of items classified as NSFW.

Nevertheless, there are some gems to be found amid the sweat and saliva of sexual frustration. For those of you who felt that turning into a ball of flies was rather limp, Orgolove's Archdemon

"Cast aside any notions you might have of recreating Baldur's Gate"

Perhaps Claudia Black's sexy deadpan has stirred the hearts and loins of Dragon Age players to such an extent that her virtual side-boobs are all anyone can think about. Whatever the

Shape and Other Bosses allows aspiring megalomaniac shapeshifters to transform themselves into ridiculously oversized entities, replete with special attacks. Meanwhile, for those of you

who stubbornly refused to splash out on DLC, but still longed for the ability to store all your accumulated crap, Misha the Hoarder by NewYears1978 adds

a wonderfully obliging young lady to your camp who'll store things for you. She even comes fully voiced. And if it's adventure you seek, Kal Sharok from Doctorofdarkness will see you exploring a forgotten Dwarven city with a party of brand new characters (including a werewolf) in an original campaign.

As for the Toolset itself, cast aside any notions you might have had of recreating Baldur's Gate in the Dragon Age engine. While the potential to do

this is there, the documentation isn't yet, and the Toolset's powerful tools can result in major instabilities should you sneeze at the wrong moment, potentially crippling your Dragon Age installation if you were daft enough to try adjusting the official campaign directly. So don't try that.

Good... doggie

But don't let these ominous words dissuade you completely. At the very least, you can make a nice new hat.

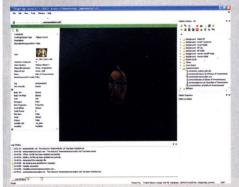
THE DIVINE ACT OF CREATION

In the beginning, there was headwear



1. BE SOCIABLE

The first obstacle faced by any aspiring *Dragon Age* modder is the simple act of obtaining the Toolset. This requires an account on the BioWare Social Network (social.bioware.com) and the registration of your Dragon Age: Origins CD key. The download itself is hefty enough at 500MB and the installation is a long process full of daunting references to databases.



4. HANDLE YOUR ASSETS

If you're familiar with Neverwinter Nights' Aurora toolset, you'll have an advantage here. Dragon Age Toolset's icons and layout are very similar, as is the act of creating new items and assigning their properties. Indeed, the simplest part of making a new hat is making the hat. Getting it into the game may lead to bellowing a series of expletives at





2. READ THE MANUAL

The DA Builder Wiki (social.bioware.com/wiki/datoolset) shows the basics of module making, so is a good place to start. However, the wiki is incomplete in places and often presumes prior knowledge, neglecting to inform you that using the *Toolset* is like talking to a toddler who keeps asking questions. Thankfully, there are plenty of modders on the Social Network offering guides and advice.



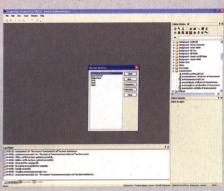
5. DEPOSIT YOUR LOOT

Unlike its predecessor, the Toolset doesn't allow you to simply drag-and-drop your new hat into the game world. Due to the limitations of the game's design, such items must find their way directly into the player's inventory, or be looted from creatures or containers. While the latter is theoretically possible, editing existing areas is fraught with complications, and as such the former is easier.



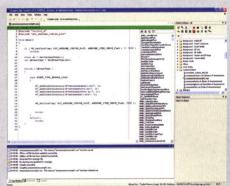
7. THE EXPORT BUSINESS

If all goes according to plan and your eyeballs remain intact, you should be ready to export your work. When exporting (which renders the mod playable), ensure that you select only the stuff you've made, and choose 'Export Without Dependent Resources', otherwise the Toolset will try to export everything in the game, and you'll die of old age before it finishes.



3. SHOW IT WHO'S BOSS

When creating a new module, ensure that 'Single Player' is ticked under the Hierarchy options. This tells the Toolset that your mod is using existing game content. And setting 'Extended Module' to 'Single Player' in module properties tells the Toolset that you're adding stuff to the main game, instead of making a new campaign. Forgetting to do these things can lead to headaches and eyeball explosions.



6. LEARN THE SCRIPT

Unfortunately, this is where you'll have to learn a bit of scripting. Not a huge amount, mind you, but enough to be able to use the UT_AddItemToInventory function to tell the game to add your new hat to your character's inventory the next time you load or start a game. Good examples of this kind of work can be found online, so you need not start from scratch.



8. TICK YOUR BOX

Your mod should appear in the Downloadable Content part of Dragon Age's main menu with a tick box to activate it. Cross your fingers, expect something to have gone wrong, but consider each monumental cock-up you make a monument to the learning process. In the end, you'll have your new hat, and any subsequent millinery work in the Toolset will seem easier.

Online Zone

What's new in PC ZONE's forum and Fight Club

Come and take on the Zone Staff in our monthly online gaming free-for-all!

Arena combat was the order of the day this month, taking centre stage over a decidedly unusual chat session, a forum creaking to breaking point with angry complaints and vociferous debate, plus a Twitter feed that has so many followers, we might just have to start naming ourselves as a religion on official census forms very soon. Keep watching the net, people.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



RAGE IS ALL the rage on Twitter, with everyone throwing out their opinions on everything, be they well-informed, ignorant or just plain mental. So why not tap into this opinionated mess by asking you, the readers, some questions.

First of all, we asked whether you hated games that require constant internet connections more than paying for content you've already technically got on the game disc.

Seregrail7 was most explosive in his reaction, wondering why "They haven't figured out to put in a few 100MB of filler to make it seem like you're downloading something." Elsewhere, comments about always-online single-player games seem to indicate that basically, you all hate it intensely, but that it doesn't necessarily have to affect the score we give it in the magazine. We tend to agree with this viewpoint, as you could probably tell from Log's review of Assassin's Creed II (issue 219).

Elsewhere, we've had the usual constructive and intelligent discourse with the public at large, which generally involved casting our eyes skyward and wondering about Mafia II's newly announced Playboy connection and, finally, saying "Did it just get roomier

FIGHT CLUB Pummel us in our Arena, readers!

That Pyro really

hates pigeons.

LITTLE CHANGE from the norm this month, although you could argue playing *Team* Fortress 2 vet again isn't indicative of that much in the way of difference. Instead of the usual gore-soaked feud that is 2fort, we went with a pick from a reader.

Clusker!?! should take a bow here for suggesting we play some Arena maps for once and so, eyes glinting with the newness of it all, we found ourselves strutting our stuff on two Arena maps -Granary and Nucleus - one of which, to the uninitiated, is a basic "two teams pile into the middle and attempt to hold an area" deal, while Nucleus was, well, we got a bit confused by it. It's set inside a building with a big thing in the middle, that's all we remember.

IN GRAINED

Granary was where the majority of the combat took place, so naturally it is to there that we turn our attention first.

Lilbitorange made a request early on in the game, which was simply that we mention him in this write-up. Ask and ye shall receive, small fruit-related person.

After that was cleared up, teams were drawn up and combat was joined. Steve made a critical error of selecting

the Sniper, which is a class that's not really suited to the close combat and rushing about required in Granary. Maybe a more capable player could have survived, but rushing the enemy with a bow and arrow is going to lead to only one place: constant death. To be fair, he took out a few players with his insane arrow-wielding and his team, perhaps because the enemy were distracted by his antics, were able to

As time wore on, Medics came to be the difference between winning and losing. If a team found they had few of the health givers in their ranks, or that the ones they did have chose their allies badly, defeat swiftly followed. To his credit, Lilbitorange didn't even need to ask to be mentioned, as his sterling Medic work at David's back provided the backbone for numerous victories, thanks to that timeless duo of Medic and Heavy proving too much for the enemy to break down.

Things had gone well and the Group Photo was a must. Usually, it's very difficult to get one set up, with players failing to read the message logs and just wading in with a flamethrower, but this time, much to the relief of the picture taker, hostilities were swiftly put aside for a few seconds and a photograph was taken. And, again as usual, it wasn't long before the photographer opened up with a minigun.

Next month, we may well try to get some Battlefield: Bad Company 2 going on, so watch the Steam announcement feed for more news.

claim numerous victories. "Steve took out a few players with

his insane arrow-wielding" "Now, zis von't hurt a bit.'

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

The Human Revolution is nearly here, but is Deus Ex 3 floating boats?

THETINGLER: The reports that Square Enix are doing the cutscenes internally are not true, apparently they're only doing the trailers. The in-game cutscenes are all made by Eidos Montreal using the game's engine. There are references to the Icarus, which suggests that we may see an early version of the Icarus/ Daedalus/Helios AI that played such a key role in both Deus Ex and Invisible War. Eidos Montreal still have to prove themselves, but that information has assuaged the "Oh God! What the f**k do they think they're doing?" feeling I felt after reading the PC ZONE preview.

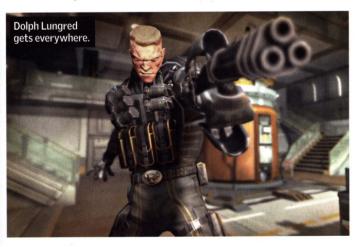
KING_CLUELESS: It was a roller coaster ride of emotion watching the trailer though. It's so funny to feel so protective of something in fact I wonder why it's like that with Deus Ex. The trailer wasn't all bad and I've still got my fingers crossed.

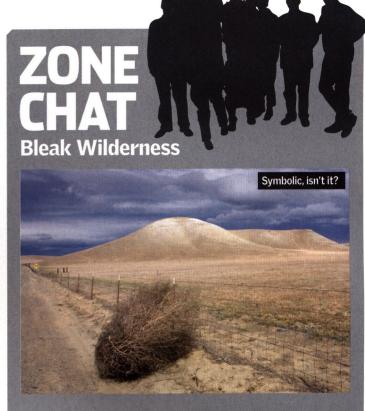
SHAKERMAKER07: The fact that it is titled 'Xbox 360 trailer' tells me that it won't be half as good as the now

hallowed original. I reckon Eidos should throw a pile of cash at Warren Spector in the hope he might scribble an overview on a napkin that they can follow at the very least. When did Deus Ex become all about "I'm a cyborg woe is me"? I know the Dentons were modified more than Wandy's PC, but I always thought Deus Ex's strengths were in the conspiracy and paranoia woven into the universe

KING CLUELESS: I did enjoy the story, even if it was bollocks. With the gameplay allowing you to play numerous ways, the linear story didn't feel so structured because it was all over the place. Love Deus Ex. Think I'll walk out of the office and go home to

LIQUID_METAL: I'm looking forward to them explaining why in 20 years time we all dress up like it's 1784 and then 20 years after that go for the Matrix trench coat and sunglasses look. That's some fashion crisis the world is going to be put through.





THIS MONTH WASN'T a popular one for chatting, as everyone who did venture into the room ended up going straight into Fight Club and ignoring the pleas of those left behind.

Steve attempted to get a little bit of discourse going, while we tinkered with the Fight Club server, but it seems not that many of you have bothered to replay Portal to find the new achievements and clues hidden within. Perhaps because others have done it for you already, who knows? MichaelKelleherTheName said he had been too busy playing other games to bother with an old one like Portal, but Marzy chirped up and said he had just played the final level to see the new ending.

Regular contributor Clusker!?! wondered aloud why David had changed his name from Plughead to Captain_Haddock, but his Tintin-related answer fell on deaf ears. After that, there was only silence as players imbibed the holy juices of Team Fortress 2.

A little burp of activity followed an hour later, as the players tired of the destruction and returned to the

"gg all" said Clusker!?!. "gg" Marzy replied.

"Anyone know whether *The* Passing on L4D will be free? I haven't been on a zombie rampage in a while," Clusker!?! asked, but there was no answer. He was alone.



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club - perhaps you've decided to wander the plains of the Serengeti to find yourself - then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers.

WHO'S WHO

Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant David Brown [PCZ]plughead Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea Jon Blyth [PCZ]log Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx

BATTLEFIELD 2

85.236.100.48:16567

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE 85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE 85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE 85 236 100 48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH 85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2

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SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



LOOKINGBACKRETROZO

Retrone Facing the wrong way since 1995..

Flashback

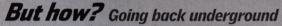
AFTER DUNGEON

FEW YEARS back Dungeon Master appeared in Retro Zone. This was a classic dungeon trawl, and the first one in 3D, with memorable moments shot through the entire game. From the first level, where you chose your party from a selection of portraits (the names Tiggy Tamal and the totally sexy Daroou are still unjustifiably fresh in my brain), to the runic spell system that worked cleverly enough to make you think you could guess spells.

This is one of the few games that made me write a childish letter to its game's developers. So Faster Than Light got a note from me which effectively said, "I love your game here are my ideas for a new monster and here is a rune I drew, it's an ultra-powerful rune that lets you do whatever you like."

DEEPER DELVING

So when the expansion - Chaos Strikes Back - was announced it was one of the first cases of heart-stopping seguel excitement I'd ever known. The news that I could import my new players from Dungeon Master? Cop that, Mass Effect 2 - you ain't all that. The idea that there was no longer a linear progression through the levels? Chew it, Just Cause 2!



This is the part where after whipping you into a frenzy of nostalgia with our ros tinted cat o'nine tails, we tell you in the most roundabout way possible to download the game off some semi-illegal websites. But not this time. No this time, we're going to point you that online junk seller eBay, for a quick search of the words

"dungeon master PC" will take you to numerous people who are selling their old copies of this game at outrageous prices. It's a freakin' video game - not a genuine antique you borderline con merchants.

Purveyor of all things secondhand.



The problem? Well, that was it. Going up and down levels didn't make you feel like you were exploring a complicated dungeon, it just thieved any sense of progress and made you feel hopelessly lost. And the difficulty of the new monsters (some of which were copied from the main game) was a symptom of the era when developers thought, "Well, the first game was obviously easy enough to complete. We won't make that mistake again."

So it wasn't until Dungeon Master II: The Legend of Skullkeep came out that everyone realised Chaos Rising was a joke. This was the sequel, after all! You could pick up tables, move them around, and go outside. Outside! And there were even shops, and a currency system



involving coins and gems. The one problem? Well, it came out nearly a decade after the first game, and didn't add much to the original's formula.

Looks like someone forgot that making the first 3D dungeon crawler ever doesn't give you the lifelong right to keep on making the same game. And that's still true, no matter how much money EA Sports makes.

The Stars of Skullkeep The heroes of Dungeon Master II



TORHAM ZED Unlike the first game. you don't get a choice about the first guy. You're lumped with TZ



HET FARVIL Skullkeep's very own Bonnie Tyler, with a name right out of the syllable generator machine.



EQUUS This chap is named after the Tim Schafer play in which Harry Potter stabs a horse. I think



BANE BLADE CLEAVER Reckon he sounds tough? His real name is Pips McGhee, and he's nine.



CLETUS A ruby in his forehead and named after a redneck: he's a front-line brawler with the most hit points.



GRAEN OZBOR The dwarf with the glowing eyes has the most mana. But keep him in the back row.

Now & Then

FEAR 3 vs CRAZY BALLOON



THE TWO MIGHT not look similar at first sight, but the systematic abuse and revenge of Alma, has more than a passing resemblance to Taito's 1980 arcade balloon-popper.

The titular balloon was out of your control, swinging wildly and suicidally out of your jurisdiction. The balloon was crazy – just like Alma. Then there are the shock twists. After a change of scenery in level three, it's back to levels one and two - but this time, the whole levels move around. It's like Taito are walking in your head and telling you that everything you know is meaningless. Just like Alma. Then there's the discordant Banjo On My Knee that kicks off the game – a nightmarish monophonic beep-version that lets you know that death is casual, and nothing will ever end happily. Just like Alma does.

Also, if you get to level 20 a dead woman straps you to a machine and sits on your cock.



Play it! How to feel the terror of a runaway balloon

Crazy Balloon is an old arcade game, so you'll need to install MAME to play it. It's illegal, but so is drink driving, and that's just about the coolest thing you can do.

When downloading MAME, it's best to get a version with a UI. Some people might get their cheapies working on the command line, but they're not actually human.

We recommend that you Bing MAMEUI32. Haha! We just used the word 'Bing' as a verb. No-one does that. Google it. Just use Google like everyone else. Bing, indeed.

Now set off a 19GB every-arcadegame-ever torrents, and you'll be liable for millions of pounds worth of punitive damages and an indefinite stay in Guantanamo Bay!

MAMEframe |

FRISKY TOM

HOPES WERE HIGH, when I saw the title: Frisky Tom. It can only be a game in which a howling cat marks his territory and attempts to woo a similar cat with a bow in its hair.

The end of every level would, I imagined, feature the two retiring to a cat box, and love hearts appearing before the deafening screeches cause the owner to throw the lady cat out, triggering level two.

Instead, Frisky Tom seems to be based on a very Japanese semiunderstanding of English. There are mice involved, so you'd kind of expect a cat – but no, Tom is a plumber. And his friskiness appears to be limited to a pair of slightly revealing shorts, and

runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.

the fact that you're fixing a lady's shower. (Perhaps he gets to watch? It's not clear)

Unplayable, fun-free, and genuinely shocking that it got a PlayStation release two decades later.





Time Trump

MEDIOCRITY GONE BY

IT'S TIME FOR another look at the games that didn't make a splash back then, and probably don't need to be remembered now. History isn't just the highs and lows - the majority is a huge amount of forgettable bollocks.

So let's pay homage to the games of September 2002 that never get mentioned in retrospectives or best-of lists.

SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL QUIZ II

SCORED: 50%

Steve Hill succumbs to cheapness: "For less than a tenner, you can't complain."

GASSI TENNIS GENERATION 2002

SCORED: 40%

Steve Hill fails to get a lob on: "Either get Virtua Tennis or stick to watching Wimbledon."

PC CD-RC **FOOTBALL OUIZ** THO 6

MYTHICAL WARRIORS

SCORED: 18%

Chris Anderson puts the boot on: "Unrewarding gameplay and lacklustre presentation ensure that this game will be taking its rightful place in the bin as soon as this game is finished."

NDUSTRY GIANT II

SCORED: 71%

Andrew Wright has his low expectations confounded: "While not a giant in its field, it's not the giant bore it threatened to be, either."

ZANARRAH: THE HIDDEN PORTAL

SCORED: 79%

Keith Pullin damns with faint praise: "A surprisingly playable blend of thirdperson RPG and no-nonsense FPS."

Back In The Day

NTASMAGORIA

Jon 'Log' Blyth opens a box and releases evil. He never listened to Pandora

DEVELOPER Sierra On-Line **PUBLISHER** Sierra Online **RELEASED** 1995

ARLING, I HAD that dream again. "What dream was that, honey?" You know, snookums. That dream where there's a sultan's head on a snake and a man looking upset in a chair. "That chilling dream, full of portent?" That's the one, darling. Do you think it has anything to do with the very essence of evil? "Well, the symptoms match, but I wouldn't rule out the possibility that you're a mad bitch, either." Thanks. Now let's sex until the game starts. "Uh uh uuh." Ooooh.

Computer games sexist? Never.

So begins *Phantasmagoria* – or so it'd begin if I wrote the script. It's a true testament to modern video compression that *Phantasmagoria*'s tiny, interlaced video window and twee blue-screening of the characters onto still backgrounds, that this game takes up 1.6GB. That's 2.5 DVD rips. It's more than an hi-def movie. It's... Phantasmagoria.

A GAME...

In essence, this is a halfway house between point-and-click adventures and the cursed genre of the interactive movie. What this means in terms of playing the game, is you get to control a digitised real lady, by clicking one of the few points on the screen that

> turn your cursor red. She will then follow one of the limited animations open to her,

before shuffling around for a couple of seconds, and returning to her idle static animation. It'd be a bit more convincing if she scratched her arse once in a while, but once she's guided herself into that idle position, there's nothing but a bristling of the white pixels that come from low-budget Chroma key.

Anyway, the storyline? Well, you've just moved into a house. Needless to say,



it's a spooky old house that used to be owned by an illusionist of questionable sanity, and behind the dining room fireplace there's a box of evil.

...OF EVIL!

The evil flies around the house, landing in your husband, which finally causes him to grow a set of balls and chew you out for being a weird, still-standing hairflicking woman who's just knocked a massive hole in their dining room wall

for no other reason than she needs a hobby.

Of course, it's not all roses and dandelions being married to the incarnation of evil - he locks himself away in that darkroom, and ruins a perfectly nice picnic by being extremely snippy. So Adrienne takes refuge in her investigations in the nearby town of Nipawomsett (most likely named after the brown nipple and womb set that make up the gynaecological special

Say Phantasmagoria with the what now?

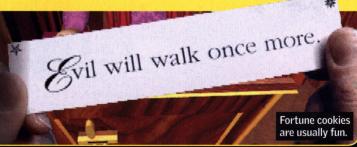
From the did-you-know fact box called the internet

Phastasmagoria, apart from being the name of albums, singles, and bands the world over. is the name of a 19th century projection show. It's just the kind of thing that made ladies swoon - not because they're frail delicate creatures - more because the fashion of the day included corsets so tight you couldn't breathe wearing them.

The magician in the game, Carno, held evenings of illusion and smelling salts, but

was dissatisfied with the fact he wasn't actually magic. Think of him as a ye-olde David Blaine, if you will. Only instead of shutting himself in a box, he bought an Egyptian book and unleashed evil upon the world.

As a side note, if evil doesn't have any humans to infect, it just dissolves into ponds, where it gives off an unappealing odour that makes frogs sad.





"Phantasmagoria is a surprising amount of fun, even if you do have to resort to irony far too often"



edition of Monopoly). And oh, the rich tapestry of characters and puzzles you'll find there! An angry dog requires a bone, point-and-click fans - but where do you get a bone from? Well, explore the grocery store, and you'll find a barrel. And what's in the barrel? Free soup bones! How do you know they're free soup bones? There's a sign, saying 'free soup bones'!

To be completely fair on the game and its author, and to avoid being an

utterly snide prick, *Phantasmagoria* is a surprising amount of fun, even if you do have to resort to irony far too often. And the story itself would probably make a decent film, once the (perhaps deliberately) twee introduction subsides into the murders and sexual assault of the later parts of the game.

Put on your most forgiving trousers, download a walkthrough, and plod through Phantasmagoria. It's a little bit of tepid history. PEZ

Putting the LOL into dialologue

Transcribing the conversations... of EVIL

MINE'S A PINTERESQUE

Adrienne: Er... ma'am? [beat] Shopkeeper: Yes? [hesitating] Hi, I'm Adrienne Delany, I iust moved from Boston. I was wondering if you could tell me... [interrupting, after a pause] Did you say your name was Adrienne Delaney. You're not a writer, are you? [quickly] Yes I am, why do you ask? I just loved your mystery novel *Blue* Moon Rising, I couldn't put it down for a week! Can I have an autograph? [two second pause] Yah! Sure! [pause] Oh, thank you! What's your next book

about? [after a brief pause] I'm afraid you're just going to have to wait for it to

[a short silence] Oh fiddle, I was afraid you'd say that. So can I help?

This agonising exchange doesn't earn you a discount on the \$2,200 dollar crucifix.







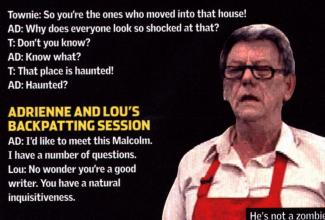
THE ESTATE AGENT

After the smarmy realty guy makes a pass at her, Adrienne's insult is confusingly timed...

Creep: Such a shame you've got a husband! What did you say your husband's name was? AD: [aside] Asshole.

SCRIPT ECONOMY

Adrienne has opened a box of evil, touched a transparent bubble of goop, and been told by other people that her house is haunted, yet she still finds it in her heart to have this conversation.



Get a room, girls!

He's just thick.

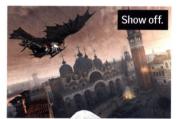
On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them









ASSASSIN'S CREED II

Stabbing Da Vinci: **Steve Hogarty**

O THE SEQUEL TO Assassin's Creed looks great, plays a whole bunch better than the first, and definitely has its moments. But I had one problem with it, and it wasn't even the DRM. It was the moments when the camera when completely spanner-mental on me.

During combat - especially near walls - an algorithm kicked in that made



the camera slip inside a building. And, unlike most games in this situation, it didn't make the wall transparent. It was only by mashing my mouse around like I was grooming a pony that I managed to see what was going on.

Oh, and when I push the W button. that means "go the direction the camera is pointing" not "Go the direction Ezio is facing". The amount of times I jumped into nothing, because I'd forgotten to tap WASD until Ezio was facing the right way first. This is only a problem when jumping, which isn't a mitigation as this is a game all about jumping.

And as Ubisoft fixed so much that was wrong with the first game, why didn't they fix the meaningless colourcoded icons? 360 owners got A on their

green button, why not a little space bar for us? I resent the time I spent in the options menu, copying out what the hell all the symbols meant.

And we all need something pointless to fill our time for no reward, but collecting 100 feathers? This is what it takes to stir your mum out of catatonia? Wouldn't it be a little more satisfying if she decided to start talking again because she loved you? She wasn't even looking, I could just say, "there you go, 100 feathers, all nice in the box," and she'd have said, "that's magic son, let's go sword shopping".

VERDICT: Feathery bollocks





history of Arnold's fight against the beast to have him killed so easily by regular aliens and humans. You're supposed to be an elite one as well. It's hard to believe these goons would be feared across the galaxy if they were as feeble as this. But in that nonsensical way that videogame developers think, whenever you have to fight an AI Predator, they're tough as nails. So is your Predator a haemophiliac or something?

And don't get me started on the performance issues. I can take a bit of slowdown every so often, my computer's not the best in the world, but crikey o' blimey, the freezing was unbearable at times. And perplexingly lot of the game to play through, three different campaigns and... no, wait a minute, they were all the same, weren't they? Just repeats of the same levels that I'd already been through, mostly. Nice one, Rebellion, Cheers for giving me value for money.

At least I could enjoy myself as a Predator by remaining cloaked and not being spotted by humans. Oh yeah, that doesn't happen either: a mere glimpse of you uncloaked means marines can home in on you for as long as they're alive, no matter how far away or how many times you've disappeared.

Thanks Rebellion. I'm fed up now. I need some Anadin.

VERDICT: Headache-y



"Nice one, Rebellion. Cheers for giving me value for money"

BORDERLANDS

Crater-faced: Adam Glick

BWAHHHH, I SCOFFED. Bwaahh, look at the sun in Borderlands - it doesn't move! That's not videogame fact. That's videogame fiction. Exactly what sort of fool do Gearbox take me for? What flavour of moron do they think I am? Unmoving sun my foot!

And then you notice that the planet of Pandora isn't lit by the sun. It's lit by moonlight, illuminated by a heavenly body suspended forever in one spot. A new moon heralds the dead of night,

and a full moon equates to high-noon. And that's a rather beautiful idea certainly an original thought.

Criticise Borderlands for its rat-like skags all you like, but you can't fault Gearbox on a design front. Skags fulfil the role of cannon fodder, but crucially: they're not rats. Nothing is anything familiar, everything is frightening or at the very least interesting.

Characters like Claptrap (I say that as if Borderlands has more than just one interesting character) will be fondly remembered for their bold presence on an otherwise desolate rock. And the art style too - for bravely scrapping the original brown blur of a game and replacing it with this painting, Gearbox. deserve a hundred million high-fives.

Until I chuck myself into the co-op I'll reserve judgement on everything about Borderlands that isn't a lantern moon, a small rat-like creature or a wise-cracking robot. In the meantime I'll be guestioning the astrophysics involved. It's questionable, surely.

VERDICT: Moonstruck



Readers on their chosen poison

SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL

Just got it for a few guid, right bastard to patch though - makes me long for the ease and convenience of auto patchers. Anyway, game looks good.

Andy_Monahan

BAD COMPANY 2

This has the best opening level I've seen in a long time, I want more of the WWII level. The modern levels are pretty good, but oh what a lovely multiplayer! Mad_Al

STARCRAFT II

Currently downloading the beta, I'm stoked that I get to test it, I loved the beta of StarCraft **Squits**



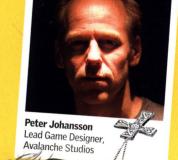


JUST CAUSE 2

David Brown tethers himself to Peter Johansson...

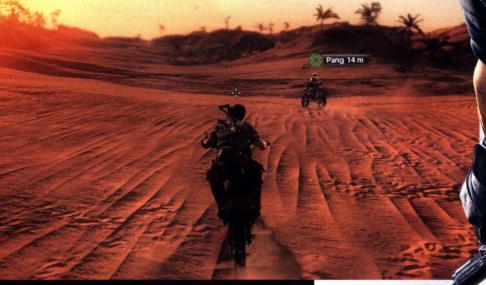
RITING UP OUR talk with Peter Johansson was difficult, because we now spend every waking second parachute-climbing mountains and battering hanging enemies to death with our grappling hooks in Just Cause 2.

Understandably pleased with the way the game came out, he was bubbling over with enthusiasm as we slumped together in overly-plush leather seats somewhere in deepest, trendiest London. Together we relayed our best "that was pretty cool when I..." stories from the game and also sought answers to that most hallowed of questions: why can't we tether ourselves to a dolphin and go surfing across the sea? Well, he wouldn't tell us, but there was lots he would impart. Read about what he had to say right below this sentence.



Heavily armed man, and people don't run. Eh?

Grappling and dragging him off the bike is an option.



THINK TANK

"One of the cool things about Just Cause 2 is it has its own flavour. It's found its own direction and I think that's something that's really needed in this genre, which is getting pretty crowded. It's centred around that sense of fun that you can have all the time. That gave us a great deal of freedom to brainstorm lots of ideas, a lot of which, in the end, we couldn't do. Like animals: having them would mean you'd have to create behaviours for them as well. The environments would have been nice with some animals in there, though. Some people don't notice it, but some do, saying "Oh, I want to explore the animal

life," and some might find it relaxing, swimming and seeing there are fish about. Perhaps you could even have tethered yourself to a dolphin. If that was in the game, it would definitely be trailer material."



02 FRIENDLESS

"Multiplayer's something you need to do exactly right, and will spend a lot of time and resources on doing. We tossed around a few ideas but we realised we'd have to spend a lot of time doing it, meaning there would be less resources we could put towards the single-player.

There were lots of things we had to improve from the first game, to get the core foundation the best we can, because otherwise we have nothing to build on for a multiplayer game anyway, because people are just going to play the game once and then just go back to playing Call of Duty.

"A lot of the time multiplayer is sort-of expected, so you do it and it ends up as a half-baked thing, so I think when we feel we're sure we can do it and

keep that exciting core experience then we will. There's a lot of really crazy physics going on too, so we'd have to deal with that."







03 ABOVE THE LAW

"I think the story is important, to give you a context to your different actions, but in the end it's also not meant to be too deep or anything, because that can get in the way of the 'fun' and the playfulness of it all. A lot of the missions came from when we started brainstorming and, in the end, the ideas just kept getting crazier and crazier. I can see why people would see '80s action films in it, and we also wanted to change the Rico character, make him a bit more rugged, a bit cooler in that sense. We didn't want him to come across as a secret agent, Rico's not really a James Bond character. He goes in with a bang, causes lots of explosions, that's his way of dealing with problems, while James Bond would probably go undercover. Rico's a bit louder than that."

"Rico's not really a James Bond character"



04 FINISH HIM & CAR TUNES

"I reckon it would probably take over 100 hours to complete everything in Just Cause 2. I know what to do, and my highest save in terms of completion, before they changed the save system and I had to start all over again, was around 60% or something like that, and I had 60 hours or so invested in it.

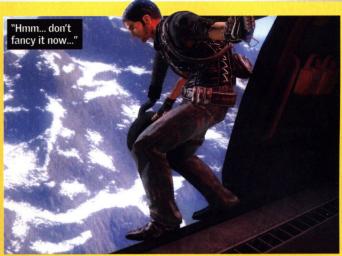
"The metrics are fun as well, the system that tracks peoples' progress, completion percentage stuff to create leaderboards based on that as well. That's really addictive and we kept playing the demo around the office and competing for the highest score, most chaos, that sort of thing."

"As for the car radio? Having one came up, but we didn't want to just do it as a knee-jerk reaction. Usually you're not going long distances in the vehicles, you're using extractions or a plane or something, so we felt it wasn't really needed. We felt it wasn't really enough bang for the buck, so we concentrated on other stuff."

LOOKINGBACKCOMMENTARY







THRILL RIDE

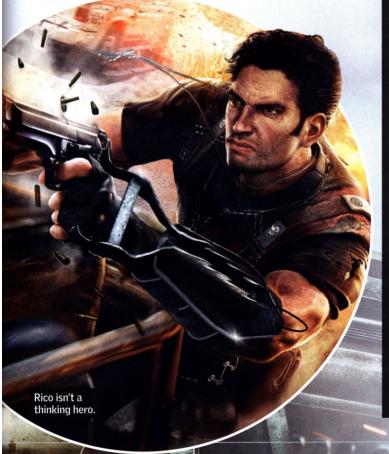
"I did something with a gas station during a mission, which has a big chase at the end that actually takes you, depending on which route you take, towards

"So what I did was, and I had a rocket launcher as well, I drove past the station to the other side, jumped up on the roof of my vehicle and fired a rocket into the gas station, which collapsed right on top on all of my pursuers.

"I got the timing exactly right, so it just fell on top of them with a huge explosion and took them all out.

"There's all the grappling hook-related stuff as well, like if there's a sniper up on a tower and you pull him down, I actually try to save them before they hit the ground. I dual-hook them as they're falling through the air, shoot it at them and then onto a wall so I can actually catch them in mid-fall."

"There's a lot more stuff to destroy, but there's a balance"





08 KILL ZONE

"We really wanted to increase the destructibility from the first game, so there's a lot more stuff to destroy, but there's also a balance. If you make everything destructible, like the buildings as well, then it takes a toll on how detailed stuff can be and it eats up memory and CPU power as well, so it's a balance that we have to strike.

"I mean, what do you as a player feel the need to destroy, what sort of feels natural to you? If you go down that road, you need to make everything destructible and, once you've taken that decision, it puts a limit on what you can do. It's an important decision and there was a lot of discussion about that. Some places, like the Mile High Club, have missions on them, so even though you might try to destroy it by ramming it with a plane, how would the mission then take place? There's that sort of thing to consider it as well.

"We played around with having multiple hooks, like "We've tethered one guy to that, what happens if you tether another guy to him?" and stuff like that, but if you then multiply it out, "What if you could tether them to that object as well, so that's going in this direction and this is going in another direction..." it becomes a nightmare."

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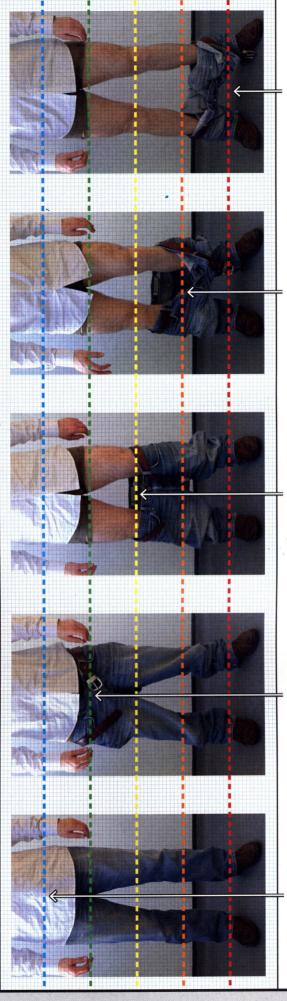
TINY COMPO 218: Philip Strait

KING OF LETTERS 218: Stuart Daglish

COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the date stated in the competition

TEXT INSTRUCTIONS: 87474 putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space and text to your heart's content (no more than 160 characters). TEXT TERMS & CONDITIONS: By texting PC ZONE you're agreeing to receive details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word NO INFO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your standard network tariff rate. ng to receive details of more offers from Future s and promotions, please text the word NO INFO at the

There's nothing more exciting than a new computing game hitting the shops. But some games are more exciting than others. That's why gaming magazines invented how completely we'd removed our trousers. And so, the Trousersoffometer was born - our way of letting you not bother with the shit we write! Here's how it works: that threaten our bowels' integrity, but we're often too excited to form sentences. Then we realised that there was a correlation between how excited we were, and the Excite Gauge - a way to allow readers to skip all that text and wallow in anticipation. At PC ZONE, we're always striving to reflect the levels of raw excitement



BUCKLED UP

Something has gone seriously wrong. Perhaps we are reacting stand-offishly to some DRM, or perhaps we just haven't got into the office yet. Sometimes you will find our trousers in this position if there's a work experience guy in, because schools make you sign stuff about keeping your trousers on.

BELISOFF

This is a game we are seriously thinking about getting excited about. It is a state of excitement that is pregnant with possibilities. Will we end up taking our trousers completely off and whirling them around our heads, as more details are released? Or will we end up sheepishly buttoning up, and admitting we made a mistake?

REALHING ROOM K

This is the stage at which we begin to give off the pheromones of excitement, attracting other magazines to come over and undo their trousers. If you want to reproduce this level of zeal at home, it's how far you can take your trousers off while sitting down, and still pull them up in time if you hear your mum on the stairs.

KNEE TREMBLER

Now this is more like it! Chances are, we're shuffling around the office trying to give each other fevered high fives. Sometimes reduced leg mobility might cause us to miss and, being off-balance, it's easy to imagine that we might crash into each other and tumble to the floor, rolling around in wordless excitement until someone goes off.

RIGHT OFF

This level of excitement is usually accompanied with a plaintive howl, as the wait caused by the linear nature of time becomes an unbearable cruelty.

Like a grown man dropping his trousers in a shopping centre, there's a tragic beauty to this stage, and it should be used sparingly so as not to cheapen the profoundly layered meaning.

Science suggests there's a level beyond this, where trousers rocket off with considerable force. If you're unlucky enough to be standing upright at the time, the force will be transferred into an upward motion of the body, sending you some feet into the air. Meanwhile your trousers, free of your weight, will begin a squealing journey around the room, the legs tracing a double-helix as they fly out of the window, and into the most beautiful sunset you've ever seen.





DRM SPECIAL! HANDS OFF OUR GAMES

How ill-considered DRM will ruin everything for everyone forever.



SUIT UP! **SPLINTER CELL:** CONVICTION

Sam Fisher sneaks into view full review next issue!



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